



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

ORIGINAL TALES OF BUFFALO BILL'S ADVENTURES

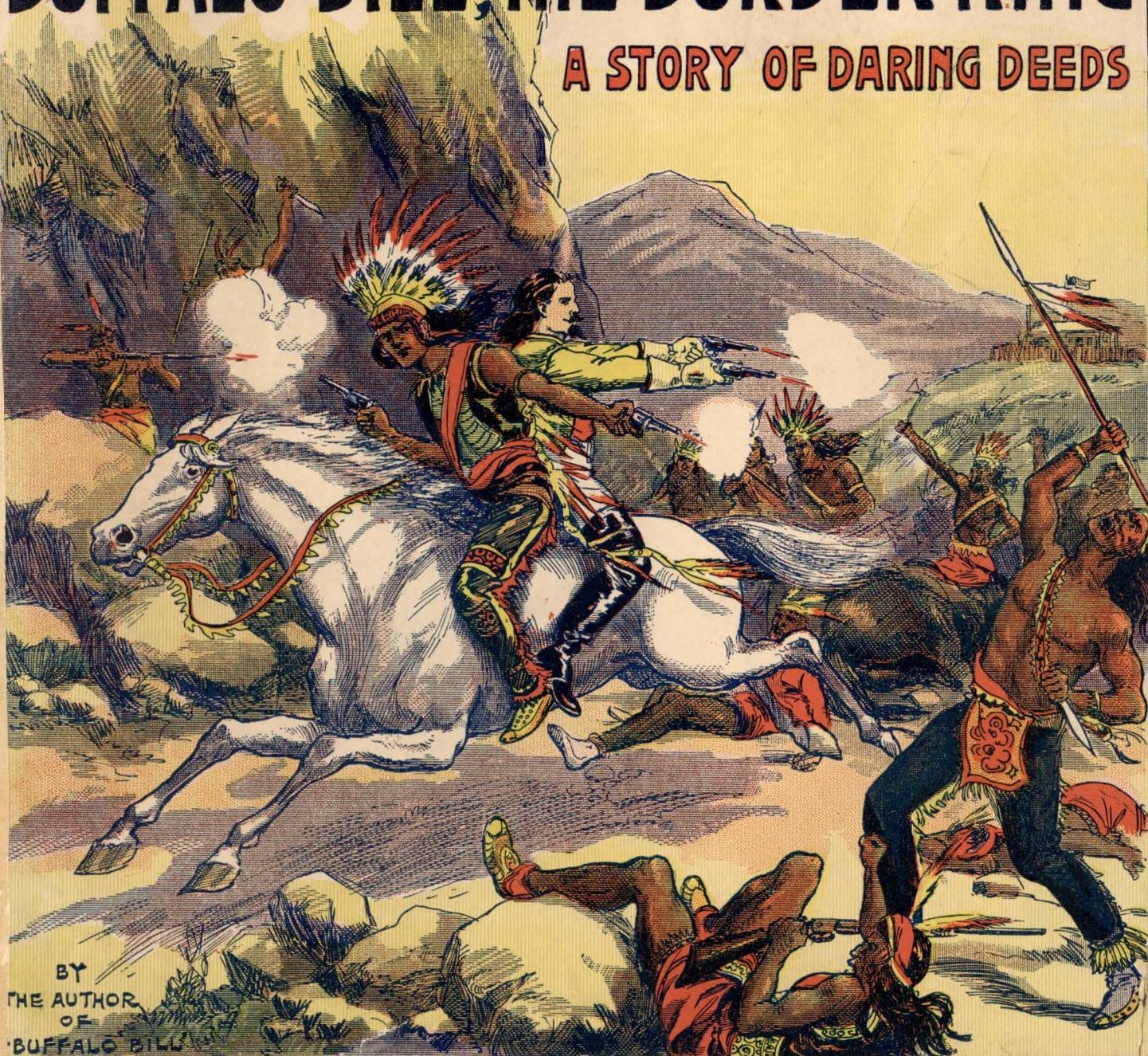
Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 1.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL, THE BORDER KING

A STORY OF DARING DEEDS



BY
THE AUTHOR
OF
"BUFFALO BILL"

WITH A LEAP THE BORDER KING SPRANG UP BEHIND HIS DISGUISED PARD, BACK TO BACK, AND OPENED FIRE WITH HIS REVOLVERS.



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Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1901, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.

No. 1.

NEW YORK, May 18, 1901.

Price Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL, THE BORDER KING.

A Story of Daring Deeds.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

RUNNING THE DEATH GAUNTLET.

"Will no man in this fort dare run the death gauntlet
bring aid to us?"

The words rang out sharply, sternly from the lips of
Major Frank Baldwin, commander of Fort Advance in
the then almost trackless Territory of Utah.

A dead silence fell upon all who heard the stern, yet
appealing appeal.

It was an appeal from the lips of a fearless man, one
who had won a record as a soldier of the Civil War and
as a fighter upon the frontier as an Indian fighter.

It was a demand for one who would risk almost certain
death to save a couple of hundred of his fellow beings,
among them a score of women and children, from the
hands of cruel savages.

Around the fort, beyond the carrying of the rifles, yet
in full view, was a belt of red warriors, outnumbering the
fort's defenders five to one.

It was a desperate situation, for Fort Advance was
located in the heart of the Western wilds in the Indian
country.

Help from their comrades was forty miles away at
the next military post.

Several brave men had attempted to run the deadly
gauntlet, and had died before the eyes of all in the fort.

Such was the situation, and another attack was threatened
at any moment from the redskins.

The ammunition was growing low; something must
be done.

So the appeal of the gallant commander had been
made.

Had it been made in vain?

It would seem so; for not a man moved forward to
answer the appeal.

Death seemed too sure a result—it would but be another
life thrown away.

Better that all should die together.

"Look there!"

The cry rang like a trumpet from an officer on the
watch tower.

All eyes were strained in the direction he pointed.

A horseman was seen riding like the wind toward the
fort.

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And he was leading a packhorse.

The Indians seemed as much surprised at his appearance as were the whites.

Splendidly mounted he certainly was.

And the packhorse flying along by his side was a racer as well, for they came on like deer.

From whence had the man come?

Who was he?

How had he gotten almost through the Indian lines undiscovered?

He certainly had done so, for no shot, no arrows had been fired at him until he was discovered by the officer on the watch tower of the fort.

Then it was that he was seen to spur forward like the wind.

He was heading directly for the large gates of the stockade fort.

That he had chosen well his place to break through the Indian death circle was evident, for there were few braves near him, and he was upon a ridge that sloped to a valley across which lay the fort on a high hill heavily timbered.

Along the ridge he sped, his rifle turned to the left then to the right, firing from the right and left shoulder with the same ease.

When he pulled trigger his bullet did not miss its mark.

The rifle rang out a death knell, or sent a wounded brave out of action.

The ponies of the Indians were feeding in the valley, with only a guard here and there, and there were no mounted warriors near to close in on him or head him off.

Hark! Their maddened yells, at the dread of the escape of the daring man, were fearful to hear.

They were in a frenzy of rage at the desperate act of the horseman.

Rifles and bows sent bullets and shafts at him, but at long range.

If he was hit he did not show it.

His horses still thundered on along the ridge.

Then down toward the valley he sped as recklessly as a frenzied buffalo.

"He can never make it!"

"The Indian guards are driving in their ponies to bar his way!"

"Who is he?"

"How he rides?"

"God guard the brave fellow!"

Such were the cries that came from the officers of the fort.

Other cries came from the men.

The women had dropped on their knees on the ground

to pray God to spare the splendid fellow who was daring the gauntlet of death.

He was showing those in the fort that he was daring to do what others had shrunk from, at the call for volunteers.

"Why does he not leave his packhorse?" cried an officer.

Then the commandant called out:

"Captain Keyes, take your troop to the rescue of that brave fellow!"

"With pleasure, sir. I was going to ask it," was the cheery reply.

The bugle sounded, only to be deadened by a wild roar from two hundred voices in a cheer following the cry of an officer who had a glass to his eyes.

"It is Buffalo Bill, the Border King!"

CHAPTER II.

THE VOLUNTEER.

The wild cheers that greeted the recognition of the daring gauntlet runner came in almost frenzied roars, the piping voices of children, the treble notes of women and the deep bass of men mingling in one grand, swelling, inspiring chorus.

The Border King, as he had been called, heard the sound.

He understood that it was for him, and he waved his broad sombrero and came on at the same mad pace.

Buffalo Bill, the Border King, was the chief of scouts at that very fort, and he was the hero of all who knew him.

As chief of scouts at the post, he was always scouting around to tell of danger to the defenders.

A week before he had started for Denver with important dispatches, but had returned in half a day report signs of large bands of Indians about.

Then he had again gone on the trail.

That the danger he dreaded was real, the surroundings of the fort several days later had shown.

Scouts had been sent for aid, but not one had got through the death belt surrounding the fort.

The belt of merciless humanity was tightening each hour, ammunition was giving out and all realized what the end would be if help did not come.

And now came Buffalo Bill, the Border King.

He was seemingly coming from the sunshine of life into the shadow of death.

Why did he do it?

The question none could answer.

But that he was coming gave a ray of hope.

All knew what the great man of the plains had done to win his name as a king among the mighty men of borderland, for such men were heroes of the noblest type.

What could he do now to help them in their great need?

That was the question.

But all hoped that he could do much.

All felt the better for his coming.

Major Frank Baldwin's face wore a pleased look.

He had known William F. Cody, the Scout, long and well.

He knew all that he was capable of.

A border boy, reared in the shadow of death, an Indian fighter from his tenth year, the hero of hundreds of daring deeds, thrilling adventures and narrow escapes, gentle as a woman, yet savage in battle as a mountain lion, he had won the title his comrades had bestowed upon him, and his coming to the fort now was worth company of reinforcements.

"Never mind, Keyes, for it is Cody, and he will get rough," called out Major Baldwin to Captain Keyes, his men were mounting.

Captain Edward L. Keyes was a splendid type of cavalry officer, and he was anxious for a brush with the redskins at close quarters.

He was disappointed.

But as the man was known to be Buffalo Bill, he reined with Major Baldwin that "he would get through." In fact, the Border King had turned his repeating rifle on the Indian guards who were trying to head him off by blocking his way with the large herd of ponies.

His rifle rattled forth lively, yet deadly, music, and his aim was wonderfully true for a man riding at full speed. Then the empty rifle was swung at his back, and with revolver in each hand the daring scout began to fairly paw a path through the herd of ponies, which quickly broke from before him and stampeded ahead of him.

Another wild cheer from the soldiers arose, for the great herd of ponies were being driven directly toward the big gates of the fort.

"Out and line them up."

"Throw open the gates!" commanded Major Baldwin. The soldiers obeyed; Captain Keyes and his troops stretching out in two lines to receive them.

In vain did the Indian guards try to head off the stampede.

By placing their ponies in the valley, where the grass is plentiful, they were caught in their own trap.

Buffalo Bill had outwitted them.

into the fort dashed hundreds of ponies to be corralled there.

Close upon their heels came the Border King, still riding his packhorse.

"On guard, all; for the Indians will charge on foot to and follow their ponies in!"

The voice of Buffalo Bill reached every ear.

Major Baldwin at once ordered all men to their posts of duty, while a cheer followed the Border King's word:

"Strip the packhorse! I have brought you ammunition!"

"God bless you, Cody, for those words—you have saved us," cried Major Baldwin, and there was a tremor in the voice of the brave officer as he glanced toward the group of women and children.

Then the major, as he wrung the scout's hand, said:

"In the name of the Rockies, where did you get ammunition?"

"From where I hid it, sir, over a year ago—there is enough to stand you until aid comes, for you have sent for it, of course, sir?"

"Sent, alas! But five men have died in the attempt," was the sad response.

Buffalo Bill's face assumed a look of anxiety—a look not often seen there.

"I had called for another volunteer when we discovered you coming—it was a splendid dash, and a desperate one for you to make, Cody."

"I will make it again, sir, for we must have help!" was the determined response of the Border King.

CHAPTER III.

THE REDSKIN KING OF THE SIOUX.

Hardly had Buffalo Bill uttered the hopeful words that thrilled all who heard him, that he would go for help, ride once more through that death gauntlet, where warning cries arose that the Indians were coming in great force, and from all quarters, all afoot save a few chiefs here and there, who had picked up stray ponies from the herd.

The ammunition, brought on the packhorse led by Buffalo Bill, was hastily distributed among the defenders, with orders to throw no shot away—to shoot to kill.

Powder was as precious to that devoted band as gold dust, and bullets were as valuable as diamonds.

Major Baldwin took his position in the watch tower, Buffalo Bill by his side, repeating rifle in hand, and near them stood a couple of young officers as aids, and the bugler.

All were armed with rifles, and every weapon for which there was no man was loaded and ready.

The women of the fort were in two groups, one to reload weapons, the other to aid the surgeon with the wounded.

The Indians came swarming up from the valley like a red tidal wave.

They were measuring their circle and expecting to rush over the stockade walls in a cyclonic charge.

They quickened their pace as they came, then began

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their weird, wild, appalling war cries, and with a bound were in a rush, sending showers of arrows and a hail of bullets as they came on.

It was a grand charge to look upon.

It was a desperate one to check.

The men had their orders and obeyed them.

Not a rifle cracked until the deep boom of the four six-pounder guns belched forth their thundering discharge of iron death shots.

Then volley upon volley of carbine, repeating rifle and musket followed.

It became incessant and the thunder of the big guns broke savagely into the fearful chorus.

And the cheers of the fort's defenders, the wild snorting of the corralled herd of Indian ponies, and demoralizing yells of the redskins made a very hell on earth.

Above all rose the notes of the bugle sending forth orders at Major Baldwin's command, and now and then the piercing, weird, wild war cry of the Border King was heard, and well did the charging Indians know the battle call of the white chief they called Pa-e-has-ka—"The Long Hair."

But Indian nature was not equal to face the deadly hail of iron and lead, and the red wave broke against the hillsides, writhed as though in death agony for a moment, then surged backward, slowly at first, then gathering speed in one mad stampede.

It was the backward flow of the mighty red tidal wave that had dashed upon the breakers of steel, iron and lead.

It surged backward, all save the many dead and a few wounded braves that remained on the hillsides, and one mounted chief.

It was Oak Heart, the great leading chief, mounted upon a large white cavalry horse he had captured months before.

The horse had determined to rejoin the whites, and he made a dash for the fort.

In vain did Chief Oak Heart try to check him.

He would have thrown himself from the saddle could he have done so.

But he had trapped himself by having bound his lariat around his body and the cavalry saddle he rode, that, if wounded, or killed, he would not be left on the field to his foe.

He had lost his scalping knife and could not cut the rawhide lariat that held him fast.

He writhed, doubtless swore in choicest Indian lingo, yelped like a wounded coyote and all in vain as he tugged at reins and lariat.

He could not check the horse nor unfasten the lariat.

His Indian braves saw his terrible position and rushed back to try and rescue him.

Buffalo Bill had been first to see the scrape into which

the chief had gotten himself, and he had run down from the watch tower, thrown himself upon his still saddle-claybank scouting horse Buckskin, shouted for the gate to be opened and dashed out toward Oak Heart.

Another moment and the Border King was by the side of the Indian chief, his revolver held at his head in one hand, his other hand grasping the rein of the splinter-white horse, and, in spite of the fire of the group of skin rescuers, he was forcing his prisoner toward the open gate of the fort.

A fire from the artillery quickly sent the would-be skin rescuers reeling back to cover, and the next moment into the stockade dashed the Border King with his captive, the Oak Heart, the Red King of the Sioux.

The cheers were deafening that greeted the heroic Major Baldwin and Major Baldwin was there to welcome the scout with a warm hand-grasp and the words:

"Another great deed to your credit, Buffalo Bill."

"It was cleverly done," and he turned to the chief whom the scout was freeing from the lariat that had been the cause of his capture.

The Redskin King of the Sioux proved worthy of his title. His face was emotionless, and his look and bearing full of fearlessness and savage dignity.

He had been captured, humbled in the eyes of thousands of braves, but he was defiant still in the face of his foes and would not reveal his heart anguish to his eyes.

"Now, Major Baldwin, I am ready to make the exchange for aid," said Buffalo Bill, with perfect coolness, turning from the Indian chief to the commandant.

CHAPTER IV.

BUFFALO BILL'S PLOT.

There was a look upon Buffalo Bill's face as he turned to Major Baldwin that told the commandant that Major Baldwin had formed a plan which he wished to make known to him.

So he said:

"Come to my quarters with me, Cody, and we will talk it over. Captain Keyes, kindly take charge of the commandant and see that he is well cared for."

When they reached his quarters the major said:

"Are you in earnest in attempting to make this desperado run, Cody?"

"Never more so in my life, Major Baldwin."

"No man knows the danger better than you do."

"And no man, I believe, sir, stands a better chance of getting through."

"I believe you, and yet, where many good men might have spared to make the attempt, you are one who can be replaced."

"Thank you, sir, but my life is no more to me than another man's is to him."

"Yet your place cannot be filled, and if I can get a volunteer, I wish to do so."

"Captain Keyes is anxious to go, sir, but——"

"Oh, yes, Keyes is a dare devil whom nothing will avert, but I refused his request, and others among my few officers."

"Then I go, sir."

"First, tell me about your mission."

"I delivered your dispatches, sir, and have here others for you. Then, on my return, I feared there was trouble here, and knowing that you had little ammunition, I remembered the supply we had to bury once, when on the expedition with Captain Ames, as our horses were so worn out they could carry but half a load, so I went by and found it in good shape."

"I had killed an Indian chief just before I reached the spot, for he came for me rough-shod, and his war-nnet and dress made a good disguise for me, and his horse was the very one I wanted for a pack-animal."

"I dressed up in the chief's outfit, loaded the pack-saddle, took my bearings as the best place to break through the lines, and I got along well until I reached the ridge."

"Then my troubles began, sir, and I skinned out of my buckskin disguise and made a run for it—so here I am."

"And a more gallant ride I never saw, and for fear that you may not know you as the real King of Bordermen, think I shall have to have you baptized as such by the Apache; but you have done nobly, Cody, and you know well I appreciate your brave deed, for the ammunition I brought will save us for several days."

"Now you have a plan decided upon, I am sure."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I have ordered dinner for you, and while you eat we can talk."

"Thank you, sir, for I am a little slim-waisted, I add, not having stopped to cook a meal since yesterday."

"Just like you, when others demand your services."

"It is live and let live with any true man, Major Baldwin."

"Yes, and you stick to the golden rule better than many of our chaplains do."

"Now, sir, although we have old Chief Oak Heart a prisoner, I am sure we can make no terms with the redskins."

"They love him, and yet they know he would not allow them to buy off for fear of harm to him."

"I believe you are right."

"Yes, sir, and so, if you will have a talk with him, for he speaks English well, as I happen to know, and what he does not understand, I can interpret into Sioux for you, you can let him know that you set him free, having no desire to take his life or punish him as a brave enemy."

"But why set him free?"

"To let me make sure of him, sir."

"How?"

"I will mount his horse, the splendid white, which he captured from Colonel Miles, and no faster, long-enduring or better animal is on this frontier."

"I will let him mount my black, which is beginning to fail me, and we will ride out side by side, for I am to return him to his people, you know, sir."

"I don't just see your plan, Cody."

"I'll make it plain, sir, by saying that I will paint up and rig up as old Oak Heart, sir, mount his horse, and ride toward his lines."

"I shall wave his braves back, as though I do not wish them to meet me, and when I get near the canyon, through the ridge, I shall make a dash for it, and you bet I'll go through all right, and nothing in that outfit can head me off, or catch me."

"And the chief?"

"Send him out of the stockade, sir, just as I make a break for the canyon, and that will confuse the Indians and be a stroke in my favor."

"A splendid plan, and I believe it can be done—in fact, in no other way could a successful run be made through that death gauntlet."

"So I believe, sir, for strategy must aid pluck."

"Yes, I see you are the one to make the effort."

"Major, perhaps, after all, it would be best for me to go out as my natural self, along with my scout pard, Texas Jack, and he to play the part of Chief Oak Heart."

"We will thus confuse the Indians until we get well through their lines, for they will think some plan has been arranged by their chief, and Jack and I can both sail through, for it is better not to have all your eggs in one basket, and one of us must get through."

"Jack has been on duty night and day, yet volunteered to run the gauntlet, but I refused, as I needed his advice; but he will go, and, as you say, it is best to have two, though I am sorry you and your Texas pard are to be the two."

"I think we will make it all right, sir—we can but die trying."

So Texas Jack was sent for, the plan made known to him, and readily agreed to.

Then Oak Heart was given a uniform and slouch hat in place of his war-bonnet and buckskin suit, the scouts had their dinner, Buffalo Bill mounted the Indian Chief's horse, and Texas Jack his own animal, and they were ready for the deadly ride.

The chief, mounted upon Buffalo Bill's black, was held in readiness to be set free as the Border King and his scout comrade reached the danger line.

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CHAPTER V.

THE DESPERATE VENTURE.

The Indians had retired sullenly to a distance from the fort, their camping line.

But the belt of red humanity still encircled the fort in a grip that plainly showed determination to bide their time for revenge.

The wounded redskins had dragged themselves, those who could do so, back toward their companions, while a few, who were too far gone to move, were brought in by the soldiers and cared for.

This Oak Heart saw, and yet his face betrayed no indication of his thoughts.

The dead were left where they had fallen, to be buried later, after the scene that must follow the flight of Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack for aid.

What would follow the departure of the two scouts no one in the fort could tell.

The defenders of Fort Advance had not escaped in the fight without harm, for several soldiers had been killed and half a dozen more or less seriously wounded.

Soon the time came for the start to be made.

Several officers urged that the Border King should wait for darkness, but he said that it would be utterly impossible for a horse to go through the Indian lines then.

The Chief Oak Heart had been mounted upon one of the captured ponies, for Texas Jack, disguised as the Sioux king, was to ride his white horse.

When Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack appeared, ready for the bold dash, many not in the secret of the ruse to be played mistook the Texan for the Sioux chief, so good was his disguise.

"Pardon me, Major Baldwin, but I would keep a belt of sentinels outside the fort, sir, when night comes on, and the men on their posts, for the redskins may crawl up for a dash at daybreak," said Buffalo Bill, as he prepared to mount.

"I will do so, Bill."

"Good-by, and may your good luck not desert you now. You and Jack carry the hopes of the garrison."

The ladies in the fort had all come forward and said good-by, with earnest prayers for the success of the Border King and his companion.

Then the word was given to start by Buffalo Bill, and they rode silently out of the fort.

"We will bear toward the left, Jack, for our best plan is to strike for the canyon," said Cody.

"Yes, but we will make the dash only when we have to, as we will gain by getting as near as possible before being discovered."

"Right you are, Jack."

"The moment the reds begin to move toward us you

must sign for them to go back, that we are coming after them."

"I will."

"But what do they think now, for they see us and wonder at you bringing their supposed chief back to them?"

"I'd give much to know what they do think, Jack, I guess before long we'll find out."

Texas Jack laughed, and Buffalo Bill added:

"It is useless to ask you, Jack, if you've got your and revolvers ready for instant use?"

"You bet I have—how ready, some of those reds soon know."

The two men were as watchful as antelopes are cautious; but they were perfectly cool and ready to death without the quiver of a nerve.

They rode slowly, and the eyes of the Indians upon them.

It was very plain that the redskins did not understand just what was the matter when they saw their chief, they supposed, coming back to them in the company of their dreaded foe, the great Pa-e-has-ka.

They began to move forward in a body to meet them when Buffalo Bill said:

"Now give them the sign language, Jack."

This the Texan did by raising first one hand, then the other, the palms toward the Indians, and waving back.

They hesitated, then obeyed.

"The game goes our way so far, Jack."

"Yes, we've got a full hand of trumps to throw when they call us."

"But I'll bet big money the people back yonder in the fort are watching us close."

"Yes, and with beating hearts, Jack, for our safety as well as their own."

"And if old Oak Heart isn't on to our bluff, and not secretly cussing in Indian swear words, I'll even wear a war bonnet, which, by the way, is about as comfortable as a wreath of prickly pears."

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"I confess your sombrero is more becoming to your style of beauty, Jack; but you've got it along, and with soap and water, soon be yourself once more."

"If I don't get scalped, which is more than likely this is no picnic for us, pard Bill."

"No; but we are doing our duty if we do go to the canyon." And that is some satisfaction. Let us bear more

They did so, and every eye in the fort was upon them; every lip was murmuring a prayer for the two in their desperate venture.

Closer and closer they drew to the Indian line, grouping toward a given point.

"That's the move I like to see them make, Jack; so sign to them to get together."

Texas Jack, playing well his part of Chief Oak Heart, signed as told, and the Indians moved more rapidly toward the point where it was supposed that the two horsemen would meet them.

"We are doing great, Jack."

"You bet we are."

"When we reach that tree ahead we must make a dash."

"I'm with you, Bill."

The tree was reached, and the Border King said, sharply:

"Now for it!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE RUSH OF THE TWO SCOUTS.

The hearts of the watching people of the garrison were in their throats, and a cry of dread came when they saw the Border King and Texas Jack start their horses from a walk into a run.

The Indians saw the act, and did not comprehend it.

They still believed that their chief was the one with the great Border King of the palefaces.

The sign language used by Texas Jack had drawn many Indians away from the canyon.

Those who did not leave were very few, yet had to be settled with.

The mouth of the canyon was really deserted, and Buffalo Bill had chosen wisely in making that point his place to break through the lines.

The great scout had eagerly counted the ponies that were in view, and saw that they were not over two dozen in number.

The stampede of the ponies had been an almost complete dismounting of braves.

The ponies that might follow, should they get through, neither Buffalo Bill or Texas Jack feared, mounted upon the splendid animals they were.

"Now we'll let 'em out, Jack," suddenly cried Buffalo Bill, when he saw that the turn had to be made direct for the canyon, for to hold on as they then were would bring them soon upon the gathering crowd of redskins.

Texas Jack smiled reckless, settled himself well in his saddle, and the two were off like frightened deer.

For an instant only the Indians stood in dumb amazement.

Then it dawned upon them that the dreaded King of the Border had outgeneraled them.

The wild war cries that broke from their lips were terrible for those in the fort to hear.

Then, as one man, the Indians rushed toward the canyon, firing as they did so.

The scouts did not return their fire.

They were keeping their bullets for marks nearer at hand, the barrier they must face at the mouth of the canyon.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill raised his rifle, and shot after shot rang out.

He fired directly in front of him, at the Indians gathering to bar their way.

There were perhaps a score of them near enough to be dangerous.

The repeating rifle of the Border King sang deadly music, for several braves fell.

With the last shot Texas Jack's repeating rifle took up the tune and rattled forth fatal notes.

They were now close upon the red group, and the hot, leaden hail had forced them to scatter.

Then, with reins let fall, and a revolver in each hand, the scouts rode on.

It was a desperate charge, and though hidden from the great rush of Indians by the nature of the ground, was in plain view of all at the fort.

"Drop behind me, Jack, for one of us must get through, you know," cried the Border King.

Texas Jack obeyed, and on the mad rush continued.

A chorus of wild yells, the rattle of revolvers, the ringing war cries of the two scouts, heard at the fort, and the Border King and the Texan were fighting, flying for life.

Every eye was upon them from the fort.

They saw Buffalo Bill's horse stagger and fall, and Texas Jack pass on.

A cry of horror came from two hundred pallid lips back at the fort.

A chorus of triumphant yells broke from hundreds of savage throats on either side of the canyon.

But the Border King arose and stood at bay.

And red men went down before his deadly aim.

And, mounted upon the Sioux chief's splendid white horse, Texas Jack was seen to turn back, dash to Cody's side, and with a leap the Border King sprang up behind him, his back to his pard's back, and a pair of fresh-drawn revolvers in his hands to fire to the rear upon his foes.

Just at that moment Oak Heart, the Sioux chief, dashed from the fort, believed at first by his braves to be a soldier.

The cheer that greeted the act of Texas Jack, in returning for his chief, and the latter's escape and novel retreat on the back of the white horse turned the eyes of the redskins toward the fort.

They thus saw their chief, recognized him through his call, and, believing that he was escaping, pressed to his rescue.

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And meanwhile Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack, mounted upon the white horse, passed on out of sight in the canyon.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ACE OF CLUBS.

"We've got through, Jack."

"Yes, Pard Bill."

"Anybody hurt?"

"I got a couple of slight arrow wounds, and your black horse went down, poor fellow."

"Yes, and a good pard he has been to me, too—peace to his ashes."

"And how about you, Pard Bill?"

"A touch from a bullet in my shoulder, and four arrows in my clothes—we were lucky."

"You bet we were. But now what is to be done, as we only have one horse?"

"I was just thinking."

"And your thoughts?"

"We cannot both ride one horse."

"No, indeed."

"One of us must push on for help."

"Sure."

"There is no danger of the reds following us, for they have few ponies left, and they all know what this horse can do."

"They do, and we do."

"Now, I will go on, as soon as we stop at the creek ahead and shape ourselves up, and you can scout around until I come back with help from Fort Resistance."

"Pard Bill."

"Yes?"

"They need every rifle in the fort, you know."

"Indeed they do."

"Scouting around here for about two days I can do no good."

"Not much."

"Well, as I've got no grub to speak of, and the people in the fort will be anxious as to whether we got through or not, I'll wait until night and then make my way through the redskin lines and go to the fort."

"You'll do no such a thing, Jack Omohundro."

"Why not?"

"There is no danger going on now for help, and I'll return to the fort and you strike out for Resistance, for I got you into this."

"Yes, and you are always looking for trouble to get into, and to keep others out of."

"No, Chief of Scouts, Buffalo Bill the Border King, I suggested the idea to return, and I go, while you go on."

"No."

"You know I speak the lingo O. K."

"Yes, as I do."

"I'm already playing Indian."

"That may be, but I can soon change my colors."

"I must be the one to go, Pard Bill."

"See here, Jack, I admit that the people need the help of one of us in the fort, and one of us must return; but the risk is great, and as you are anxious to take it while we go through no danger to reach the post, I say I must be the one to return to Fort Advance."

"Well, on one condition."

"What?"

"I like to play chance games, and you do too, so I'll draw lots to see which one goes."

"I don't like to do this."

"It's as fair for you as for me, so when we reach the creek, we'll just make it a game of chance to see who goes back."

"I'll go you, for my luck will stand by me."

"I'm something of a child of fortune myself."

They soon reached the creek, dismounted, looked to their slight wounds, dressing them for each other, divide their rations, for they had brought but little along to eat, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Now we'll draw lots to see who goes; but I wish we had a pack of cards."

"I've got what the boys call a Sing Sing Bible," and Texas Jack pulled from an inner pocket a pack of playing cards, adding:

"I always find them come in useful."

"Good! But we can't take the time to play a game, so I'll shuffle, you cut in two even parts and the one who holds the Ace of Clubs goes to the fort."

"Pard Bill, it's a go, and your plan is the one."

"Shuffle 'em good, though I've got the game."

"Don't be too cock-sure about that, my brave friend Texas, for I'm something of a game winner myself."

The men spoke in a light-hearted way, but each knew the terrible ordeal to fall to the one who attempted to return to the fort.

They knew that the aid of one of them was needed Major Baldwin, as an adviser, and his rifle as well.

They also were aware that the news that one had gone for help, after getting safely through the lines, would a note of joy to the garrison.

For these reasons, and having but one horse, they were both anxious to take the risk.

The cards were shuffled by Buffalo Bill, Texas Jack cut them in two equal parts, and, with smiling faces, they began to play the game that was to have one of the risk death in its worst form.

Only a few cards were thrown down, and Buffalo Bill had revealed the fact that he held two aces.

"And I have one—the Ace of Clubs," cried Texas Jack.

One looked triumphant, the other regretful.

"I told you I was a Child of Fortune, Pard Bill."

"Well, I yield, Jack, and may your luck take you through in safety."

"I'll get there with both feet, or the reds will know that I tried."

"Yes, and the garrison, too."

"Now, I must be off, and the white must show that he can make the miles fly behind him."

"So I'll be back with help as soon as men can get there."

"Yes, I know well that you'll bring help upon the jump."

"And now, good-by, Jack, old pard, and—and—and if you do go under I'll see that there are red ghosts on the same trail to the Happy Hunting Grounds to avenge you."

"I know that, Bill."

Neither dared trust himself to say more, their hands clasped in an iron grip of good-by, and, walking quickly to where the splendid white was feeding, Buffalo Bill threw himself upon his back and rode away in a long, sweeping gallop.

Once he looked back.

There stood Texas Jack, looking like an Indian chief, silent and thoughtful.

A wave of the hand of each was another farewell, and then the Border King disappeared from sight, while Texas Jack began to prepare for his mission, as night was not far away.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACING DEATH.

Texas Jack had been a ranchman in Texas from early boyhood, a ranger and a scout in the Confederate Army, where he had made a record.

Of a cheery nature, splendid form, strong as a grizzly, fearless to recklessness, and a handsome fellow, Buffalo Bill had found in him, when a cattleman in Kansas, the very one for a special pard, and had gotten him on as a scout in the United States Army.

Such was the man who now took his life in his hands to return and give his aid to the garrison of Fort Advance.

He knew all that he had to risk, but, in his Indian disguise, and under the cover of night, he hoped to escape through the Indian guards.

If captured, he was well aware that death by torture would be his fate, for the Sioux all knew him as a deadly foe.

That he could speak the Sioux language was in his fa-

vor, as well as that Indians were not given to asking questions without good cause, and he might pass without being questioned.

He quickly formed his plan and started to carry it out.

He had reloaded his rifle and revolvers, loosened his knife, and at once made his way with the greatest of caution toward the ridge that ran to one side of the canyon.

He did not care to attempt to return through the canyon.

There would, doubtless, be too many Indians there, and he had no desire to be sociable with them just then.

Night came upon him as he reached a timbered ridge that gave him a view of the range he wished to follow, the valley to cross and the fort on the hill.

It was yet light enough for him to see the circle of redskins surrounding the fort, though out of range of fire.

Here and there they were in groups, again there was a thin line, and in places where the ground was very rough and rocky, there was only a sentinel scattered along.

Texas Jack picked out the spot where he would make the effort to get through the line.

It was where the Indian sentinels were few and far between.

Along the base of the hills, a couple of miles from the fort, the main force of the Indians were camping, while only half a hundred ponies were visible feeding in the valley, and with double guards about them.

The loss of their ponies had been a severe blow to the Indians, and Texas Jack knew well that they would try that much more to retake them.

Over where the campfires glimmered, Texas Jack knew that Chief Oak Heart must be.

That plans of cunning and deviltry were being hatched out, the scout was certain.

Then he thought of the Border King flying along for help.

Awaiting with the stolid patience of a redskin for the night to deepen, the scout at length took up his march for the break through.

He had carefully considered all chances for and against him.

He was now to take them.

That almost certain death stalked by his side no man knew better than he did.

Along the ridge he went, and slowly, and with the caution of a panther creeping upon its prey he walked on until he came to the steep descent into the valley.

All was as silent as the grave.

Not an Indian moved, as far as he could see.

They were not given to talking.

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

They were near, upon each side, in his path, but as silent as ghosts.

On he went, until at last a form arose from the ground ahead of him.

The Indians were looking for someone to attempt to pass out of the fort, the garrison not knowing that Buffalo Bill and himself had gotten through.

They were as watchful as prairie dogs.

Suddenly a form arose before him.

It was the Indian chief, from his war-bonnet, and evidently going the rounds of the sentinels.

He was not fifteen paces distant.

Just where others might be, Texas Jack was not sure. The chief halted and stood as though listening.

His face was turned toward the lights in the distant fort.

The scout moved forward with the noiseless tread of a cat.

That chief barred his way.

He must be removed—at least, silenced.

"I hate to strike, even an Indian, in the back; but I must."

So he mused, and his hand was thrust around and grasped the red throat in an iron lock, the other driving the knife deep to the heart.

A choking sound and the Indian was dead.

Carefully Texas Jack lowered the body to the ground, took the rifle, bow and arrows, "for future reference," he grimly muttered, and passed along with bolder step.

He had gone perhaps a hundred yards, when he saw forms ahead.

One was standing erect, the other lying upon the ground.

To drop one with an arrow would be to cause a yell of warning from the other.

He must play the Indian.

"Ugh!" he said, and stalked boldly on, passing near them.

He did not care to test the purity of his Sioux as spoken, and was willing to say nothing, provided they did not.

He assumed the stride of the Indian, and with his war-bonnet looked what he wished them to consider him.

CHAPTER IX.

BREAKING THROUGH THE RED CIRCLE.

It was fortunate for Texas Jack that the Indians had no questions to ask their chief.

They merely answered his guttural salutation in the same way, and the scout passed on.

He was happy over his success thus far.

But he was as cautious as though he had scores of others to meet.

On he went, and no other Indian arose before him.

Across the valley he made his way—to see an Indian horseback, coming toward him.

The redskin was, doubtless, a chief on his rounds.

If he saw Jack, he might wish to consult him.

Texas Jack had no desire for a consultation.

He dared not run, so dropped down, hoping the Indian would take him for a brush or a rock.

He was coming dangerously near—too near for comfort.

The scout was a dead shot with the bow and arrow as he was with rifle and revolver.

He must use a silent weapon to get rid of his foe.

The bow and arrow of the dead chief came in hand and was put to use.

An arrow was fitted to the bow, and in a crouching position the scout waited until the Indian was almost upon him.

Then the arrow was let fly, and with great force.

The aim was to send it through the throat and still all outcry.

But the arrow went lower, struck hard, yet did not silence a wild death-cry that rang out appallingly in the silent valley.

With a spring, Texas Jack grasped the bridle rein of the pony, and, as the red rider fell off on one side, dropped upon the horse's back from the other and dashed away at full speed for the fort.

The death cry was answered by wails, yells and voices—all knew what it meant.

Some white man was trying to run the gauntlet, and had given a death blow to some warrior that had barred his way.

The wild cry had been heard by the outer line of sentinels from the fort, and an alarm was given.

Shots, yells and Indian cries were heard in the valley.

But Texas Jack sped on unhurt, for the danger was behind him.

Nearer the fort there were here and there young braves scattered, creeping up in the hope of getting a shot at sentinel.

They at once started on the jump back to their lines.

One of them saw the scout coming up the hill at speed.

He fired quickly.

So did the scout.

The aim of both was true, for the Indian killed scout's pony.

The scout killed the Indian.

Though shaken up by his fall, Jack was on his feet in an instant and running on to the fort.

He suspected there was a line of sentinels outside the fort, and he hailed:

"Ho, men, I am Texas Jack!"

A cheer was the answer.

It ran along the line, was echoed from the sentinels in

the stockade, then answered by the soldiers in the fort.

A few minutes more and Texas Jack passed in through
the gates.

Proud of his deed, as he had a right to be, he shouted:
"Slightly disfigured, boys, but still in the ring."

Major Baldwin was there to welcome him, and then
spoke anxiously:

"And Cody?"

"A long distance on his way to Resistance, sir."

A cheer greeted the reply.

"His black went down at the canyon, sir, and we played
game to see which would come back to help you out—
won."

A silence followed the words.

All were too deeply moved to speak or cheer.

That the two scouts had gambled upon who should
live to come back into the fort showed the stuff they
were made of.

"I trust you were not hurt on your way, Jack, though
you did raise a merry rumpus in the Indian camps," said
Major Baldwin.

"Now, didn't they turn loose for a few minutes, sir?

"But I got only a shake-up, major—for I got too proud
to walk, and the pony I tackled took a header with an
Indian bullet in him.

"Somebody got worse hurt than I did, though, and I'm
not kicking a little bit, as luck came my way."

"And ours. I need your aid, Texas Jack, for though
my officers and men are as true as steel, and able, too,
our experience is worth much, not to speak of your
experience when you set it going.

"I tell you that your coming, and the knowledge that
Buffalo Bill got through all right, gives us a great hope,"
said Captain Alfred Taylor, of the Fifth Cavalry, who was telling Texas Jack to accompany him, Major Baldwin led the way to his quarters, where he had the scout tell the story of the reckless drive through the death
valley.

CHAPTER X.

THE RIDE TO THE RESCUE.

The Border King did not spare the white horse he
de, for he was riding to save many lives.

He had known the horse when he was the favorite
animal of Colonel Nelson A. Miles, and he was well
aware what he was capable of.

The white horse had been captured by Oak Heart in
an attack on a military camp, and Colonel Miles had told
Cody to try and get him back from his Indian master,
saying:

"I will give him to you, Cody."

And now the Border King had the long-bodied,
strong-limbed racer, as fleet as a deer and as tireless as
a hound.

"The colonel used to call you Runaway, I remember,
and what Oak Heart christened you I don't know, but I
shall call you after your redskin master, and it shall be
Chief," said the scout to his splendid horse.

On flew the noble white, hour after hour, mile after
mile, keeping up a steady lope.

When darkness fell, Buffalo Bill halted by a stream,
took the saddle and bridle off of Chief to give him a
rest, and allowed him to crop the luxuriant grass that
was there like a velvet carpet.

He ate his cold supper in silence, lay down for a short
rest, not for himself so much as for his horse, and after
an hour was again in the saddle.

He knew the trail to Post Resistance well, and kept up
the steady gait he felt would get him there before day-
break.

And it did so, though horse and rider were very tire
when the lights of the post came in sight.

"Halt! Who comes there?" rang out the sentinel's
challenge.

"Scout Cody, with urgent dispatches," was the quick
answer.

As he was admitted into the post he quickly told the
officer of the day why he had come, and in a minute
later was in the presence of Colonel Royall, the com-
mandant, who had gotten quickly out of bed to see him.

In his terse way the Border King explained the situ-
ation exactly, and the energetic commandant at once or-
dered his adjutant to call out two troops of cavalry,
mount two companies of infantry, and with a couple of
light guns to start to the rescue, carrying extra supplies
of ammunition in ambulances.

Captain Alfred Taylor, of the Fifth Cavalry, was placed in command and ordered to start within the hour.

After telling the colonel how he and Jack had run the
gauntlet of the Indians, the reply of the officer was:

"Another proof, Cody, that you are indeed the King
of the Bordermen; but now seek rest after you have had
something to eat, for my scouts will guide the command
to Fort Advance."

"I'll eat, colonel, but not sleep, for I have not time, as
I go back with Captain Taylor," was the reply.

"But you cannot stand it, Cody."

"Oh, yes, I can."

And when the command pulled out from Post Resist-
ance Buffalo Bill was ahead as scout and guide, while
also went along half a dozen men in buckskin from the
command of Colonel Royall.

It was dawn by the time the start was made, and the

march was kept up briskly for a couple of hours before a halt was ordered for breakfast.

Then it was a rapid trot up to the noon hour, and a longer halt was made for dinner, while Buffalo Bill, snatching a mouthful of food, rode on with a couple of scouts, to see how matters stood ahead.

He knew that a ride of three hours would bring them in sight of the Indians around the fort, and he was anxious to make the return in the quickest time possible, and was much pleased that he could say that he had cut through the redskin line, ridden fifty miles to the post, and returned with three hundred soldiers within thirty hours.

Another thing, the Border King was anxious about the Advance garrison, for he knew that, well aware that he would bring help, the Indians would be determined to capture the fort with all dispatch.

That they would expect help to come so soon he knew they would not, and hence they would be surprised, while Chief Oak Heart, not aware that only the day before a large body of reinforcements had arrived at the military post, he would not expect that Colonel Royall could spare more than one troop of cavalry to aid Advance.

This many Oak Heart would prepare to fight and defeat.

This was all in the mind of the Border King as he rode ahead with the two scouts.

Before riding several miles they came to a cut in a range of high hills, and the Border King halted suddenly.

"Hark! They are attacking the fort, men!"

"Go back, Judd, with all speed, and hurry Captain Taylor on."

Away dashed Scout Judd, and Buffalo Bill and Scout Barney rode on at a rapid pace through the narrow cut in the range.

Once on the other side of the hills, and the sound of the guns at Fort Advance were distinctly heard, with the rattle of rifles also.

A couple of miles further on, and Buffalo Bill again halted and listened attentively.

"They are having a hot time there, and old Oak Heart is determined to take the fort.

"From the firing I know that Major Baldwin is short of ammunition, so go back, Barney, with all speed, and tell Captain Taylor to get there if he kills every horse in his command. A short delay may be too late."

Away dashed Scout Barney, and the Border King once more rode on toward the fort, his face white and stern.

CHAPTER XI.

A FLYING FIGHT.

Captain Taylor came up with the Border King three miles from Fort Advance.

His horses were in a foam, half a hundred troopers only were with him, and the balance and the mounted fantry, with the guns, were stretched out for seven miles back, but pushing on at the best of animal durance.

"Oak Heart is not looking for help for the fort hours yet, Captain Taylor, and so is throwing his whole force desperately in the attack.

"From the firing I know that Major Baldwin is sparing of his ammunition.

"May I have a few men, sir, and push on, while you form your men as they come up?"

"Yes, indeed, Cody; and you can at least show help is at hand."

"Go, and God bless you, my brave fellow. Take the men whose horses can stand the drive," answered the gallant captain.

"And you, sir, send the troopers through the cut into the valley and the infantry and guns along the ridge. Scouts Judd and Barney will guide you, sir, as you me you did not know the locality."

"Nor do I. Go!"

Away started Buffalo Bill, with two lieutenants and a couple of score of their troopers keeping close on his horse's heels.

In a short while they were dashing along the ridge and burst in full sight of the fort.

It was a surprise to the Sioux to behold them, for they had no idea help was so near.

It was joy indeed to the gallant defenders of the fort for they were about out of ammunition, and Oak Heart and his braves were pressing closer and closer.

An hour, perhaps half as long, would have seen death grapple at close quarters.

Oak Heart found himself defeated.

But he was game to the last.

Though caught between two fires, he did not allow his warriors to stampede in a panic.

He rallied them, formed them in a massive column, the few mounted braves on the flanks, and began to circle around the hill upon which stood the fort, and move toward the heavy timber beyond.

The lieutenant, Dick Danforth, in command of the advance guard of relief, turned to Buffalo Bill and said:

"What shall we do, Cody?"

The Border King listened for a moment, and then the heavy fall of troops coming up, and said:

"Help is coming fast, sir, and it might be well

charge them, for the cavalry from the fort will come out to support, and the Sioux need a lesson."

"Good!"

"Bugler, sound the charge!" cried the officer.

In another minute the troopers, half a hundred in number, were thundering down the hill into the valley, in hot pursuit of the retreating Indians, who, on foot, moved slowly.

With stubborn courage they retreated, however, the lead of the column suddenly turning toward the river, a mile away.

Escape that way they could, at least, with their lives, and Chief Oak Heart had chosen well.

But the troopers crowded them hard, Captain Keyes and two troops from the fort rushing out to join in the pursuit, and drawing sabres for close work, as their firearms were useless, all their ammunition having been shot out.

"Three cheers for Buffalo Bill!" shouted Captain Keyes, as the two commands neared each other, and both the rescued and the rescuers gave them with a will. "Cody, you have saved us!" cried Keyes, and, recognizing the officers commanding the rescuers, for the troops were from his own gallant regiment, he called out:

"Danforth, Mercer, I greet you and your splendid men. God bless you!"

"Now use the steel on those red hides!" and, his rank placing him in command of the new arrivals, he led the charge, just as Captain Taylor's artillery, having reached the ridge, opened fire, and sent shell after shell into the now flying column of redskins.

Across the valley, too, were seen cavalry and mounted infantry, stretched out in lines, hastening to join in the running fight.

"Our guns and rifles are dead, for we are out of ammunition, Danforth," called out Captain Keyes.

And he added:

"But our blades are sharp. Now for it!"

It was a grand charge, and Captain Keyes struck the mass of humanity, with the Border King by his side and Texas Jack coming at a jump near by.

Suddenly the Sioux had halted, to deal their blow, and it was a severe one, for saddles were emptied.

But it was a flying fight, give and take, and the troopers pressed the old Indian general hard, and forced him and his braves to seek safety by leaping from the tentot high banks into the river, some of them rallying under shelter and picking off the cavalrymen.

"I know you, Great White Chief Buffalo Bill. Oak Heart never forget—you save your people—kill my young men—me remember, *Pa-e-has-ka!*"

The words fell from the lips of old Oak Heart, and

were distinctly heard by the troopers, Captain Keyes calling out:

"He's got it in for you, Bill."

Raising his voice until it sounded like a trumpet, the Border King shouted back to the Sioux chief:

"*Pa-e-has-ka* knows the Oak Heart, and will not forget!"

The Border King could have picked off the chief with his rifle even then, but would not do so, and both he and the army officers would not allow the men to fire upon the Indians in the river.

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

It was a victory for the pale-faces, yet dearly won, for within the fort and among the rescuing force nearly a score of troopers had fallen and a number were wounded more or less seriously, while slight wounds were many, yet not counted.

But the fort had been saved in the time of its greatest need, hundreds of Indian ponies had been captured, and the result was well worth the sacrifice that had to be.

The Indian army, under its brave and able leader, the King of the Sioux, had been terribly defeated, for the loss in dead braves was heavy, the wounded were many; they had been dismounted, had lost their supplies, many weapons, and had been taught a severe lesson they would not soon forget.

Upon every tongue was heard the name of Buffalo Bill the Border King, for, but for him, how different would have been the result.

All knew and felt just what the great scout had done, and to-day his saving of Fort Advance by his daring deeds is remembered all along the border.

Embarrassed by the praise bestowed upon him, the scout looked to the care of his horse, Chief, and then slipped away to hide and rest, and Texas Jack kept his hiding-place a secret that he might not be disturbed. When he slipped out of his retreat the next day he was greeted with a cheer and Major Baldwin sent for him, and at parade that evening complimented him before the entire command, while Texas Jack was not forgotten for the part he had played in the affair.

When matters had quieted down a little at the fort some of the rescuers had returned, and all was going well, Buffalo Bill had a talk with Major Baldwin, the result being that the scout started off alone to follow the trail of the Indians and see just what they were doing after their defeat and discover if they were plotting more mischief.

Buffalo Bill had another motive in his lone scout.

It was to hunt out the haunt of a band of overland road agents, who, under an old foe of his, Boyd Ben-

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

nett, a deserter from the army, had been lately robbing the stage coaches that made weekly runs along the line of military posts.

The road agents had successfully held up several of the coaches and robbed the passengers of considerable money and valuables.

As an army paymaster was to soon make the rounds by coach paying off the garrisons it was important to locate Boyd Bennett, the overland bandit and his gang, and send a force to attack them.

It was upon his return from the trail of the Sioux that he meant to go on the track of the bandits, but this latter fact was kept a secret.

After a couple of days' trailing into the Indian country, Buffalo Bill found that Oak Heart, the chief of the Sioux, was not then plotting another move, having been taught a lesson that would last for a short while at least, so he decided to go at once to hunt out the retreat of Boyd Bennett.

He reached the tramping ground of the road agents without adventure and turned into the overland trail, hoping to be in time to meet the incoming coach to Fort Advance, from Post Resistance.

He was in time, and came upon the coach.

But he drew rein suddenly, for what he beheld was a shock to him.

There was the coach, the horses standing patiently in the trail, and yet no driver was upon the box, nor did he see any one near at his first glance.

Spurring forward he beheld the driver, Bud Sharkey, whom he knew well; but he was dead.

Then he saw three others.

They were an officer and two soldiers.

They, too, were dead.

And more, they had all four been scalped.

This told the Border King that Indians had held up the coach.

Then Buffalo Bill recalled that a short while before reaching the trail he had shot a deer, to have some venison steak for his supper.

It was his shot that had frightened the Indians off.

Looking about him with experienced eye, Buffalo Bill read the signs he saw.

There were the tracks of half a dozen unshod Indian ponies, so the force was a small one, doubtless some of Oak Heart's young braves.

The driver and the soldiers had all been shot with arrows.

The officer he also recognized.

It was Captain Hinkley, the paymaster, and he had come West more than a week ahead of the time he was expected to arrive at Fort Advance.

That he had his treasure bags along, with the money

to pay off the troops—a large sum—Buffalo Bill well knew.

Had the Indians gotten them?

A rapid search revealed that the marauders had been frightened off before they could take the treasure.

There was but one thing for the Border King to do and that was to place the bodies in the coach, hide the treasure bags to come after later, for he dared not risk taking them along then, tie Chief alongside of one of the leaders and drive the stage on to Fort Advance himself.

He quickly carried out what he had decided upon first scouting around to see that the Indians had surely gone and none were near, and then securely hiding the treasure bags.

When all was ready to move he mounted the box, seized the reins and started off in a way that showed he was a splendid driver.

He had not driven a couple of miles from the scene of the tragedy, when, loud and threatening, came a voice from the side of the trail where there were a number of large rocks:

"Live or die—yours the choice!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BANDITS OF THE OVERLAND TRAIL.

It was Buffalo's Bill's choice just then to live—so he drew rein.

He knew from whom the command came, just as well as did he know that resistance was useless.

"Up with your hands, or die! Come, take your choice, Buffalo Bill!"

The threatening words had been repeated, as Buffalo Bill had simply reined his horses to a halt and had grasped the lines.

He saw at a glance that an outlaw had sprung to the head of each horse, and that he was covered by seven rifles, as well as the revolver in the hand of Boyd Bennett himself.

With no change of expression even, and not the quiver of a muscle, he answered, calmly:

"As you hold trumps in this game, Boyd Bennett, go my hands."

The reins were given a turn around the lantern, and Buffalo Bill coolly raised his hands above his head, to the apparent relief of the outlaws, who seemed to fear that after all he might resist, and they knew that such a man would wound him as they might, would die hard, and game to the last.

"You have acted wisely, Buffalo Bill, and I am glad to know that even you, in a tight place, can be cowed."

"We'll not discuss that, for I am anxious to get on and do not detain me."

"Well, you carry the gold-box on this trip, and I will trouble you for it."

"You are mistaken."

"I know to the contrary, Buffalo Bill, for it was put upon the stage at the headquarters station."

"Come. I'll stand no trifling; as I know you would not have been put on to drive this trip if the old hearse did not carry the soldiers' money."

"You keep well posted, you road thief, but you are behind time on this run."

"What do you mean?"

"The coach has already been robbed."

"You lie!"

The scout laughed and replied:

"Just take a look into the coach."

"You have set a trap for us?"

"Scared at nothing, are you? Well, I'd hate to have our conscience on a dark night."

"Men, if he moves, kill him," and Boyd Bennett stepped p to the coach and threw open the door.

Even he started at what he beheld there.

"The devil! What does this mean, Buffalo Bill?"

"Indians!"

"How did you escape?"

"Wasn't with the coach."

"And the treasure box?"

"It's safe, I guess."

"The reds got it?"

"Well, you can go and ask them what they got, for they are not over a dozen miles away."

"You got that money!"

"If I did or did not, you lose the game."

The face of Boyd Bennett grew black with passion, and for a moment he was silent, while into his eyes gradually crept a look of devlish intent.

Then he spoke, and in a tone that was full of rage:

"Buffalo Bill, you have sealed your doom by this."

"I have heard the same threat before, Bennett," was a cool reply.

"Mine are no idle words, as you shall see."

"Two of you men get upon that box and bind him surely," came the stern order.

Two of the outlaws at once obeyed, as far as clambering upon the box was concerned; but then they were suddenly seized by Buffalo Bill, and while one of them was hurled backward to the ground, the other was rasped around the waist, and the scout sprung with him from the box.

As they alighted, Buffalo Bill had drawn a revolver,

and was throwing it forward to fire upon the outlaw chief, when the weapon was knocked from his hand by a blow from behind, and several of the bandits threw themselves upon him.

"Upon your lives, do not kill, or harm him!" shouted Bennett, springing forward to join in the fight for mastery.

Borne down by the weight of numbers, Buffalo Bill, giant in strength that he is, was unable to break from his foes, and was securely bound hands and feet.

Then the bandits turned to their chief for further orders, and the look of fiendish cruelty upon his face proved that he had formed some diabolical plot to avenge himself upon his old-time foe, who had so cleverly thwarted him from seizing the government money.

"Now drag him upon his box again," ordered the bandit leader to his men, and with an effort they obeyed.

"Lash him there!" was the next command, and Buffalo Bill was firmly tied to the box.

"Now, throw the reins loosely over the footboard!"

This order was also obeyed, Buffalo Bill the while looking calmly on, evidently anticipating the crime his enemy intended, yet uttering no word, and with not one atom of fear of his fate visible upon his fine face.

Having executed their work, by lashing Buffalo Bill with lariats firmly to the boxseat, and his feet to the footboard, the outlaws turned again to their cruel captain for further orders.

"Hold on, Bennett, before you go too far!"

The cry came from the stern lips of Buffalo Bill.

The outlaw turned, with a wicked smile, upon his bound prisoner, and asked:

"With what do you threaten me, Bill Cody?"

"The worst fate that ever met mortal man, if you dare to commit the deed you have in view," was the bold reply.

"Dead men tell no tales, Buffalo Bill," sneered the outlaw.

"Oh, yes they do, for my fate will soon become known, and you'll find there are men who dwell on this border that will hunt you down to a worse death than that you visit upon me."

"You know, then, what I intend shall be your doom, it seems?"

"I do."

"Well?"

"What is it?"

"To lead the horses to yonder fork of the trail, turn them loose, and force them down Breakneck Hill."

"You are right, Buffalo Bill, for such is my intention," was the bold reply.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Buffalo Bill's face was pale under the fiendish threat of the outlaw leader, yet he did not show an atom of fear.

He knew the man, and that he had a bitter hatred for him.

He knew, also, that it was no bluff on the part of the outlaw to frighten him into giving up the government treasure, for did he do so, Boyd Bennett would still settle the score against him, as he had sworn to take the life of the scout.

Then Boyd Bennett said:

"And, my handsome plainsman, I have not forgotten that some time ago you captured me and sent me to prison."

"Where you deserved to go, as a horse thief and cut-throat," was the fearless response.

The outlaw leader laughed lightly, for he felt that his time of revenge had come, and without reply, he turned to his men and asked:

"Is all ready?"

"Yes, captain."

"Unfasten that splendid white horse from alongside the leaders, for I need just such an animal in my business."

It was done.

"Now, Buffalo Bill, straight for the Breakneck Hill you go, and if these horses do not carry you down it at speed that will smash this old hearse to atoms, and break your neck, I'll give up the road-agency business and turn parson," said the outlaw leader, in a cold, heartless voice, and a look that told the joy he felt in his anticipated revenge.

"I ask you to give up such cruel revenge—shoot me, instead," and Buffalo Bill spoke in a low, earnest tone, that proved he had no fear of death.

"No, Buffalo Bill, I send you, your horses, the hearse, to the devil together."

"Here, men, lead these animals to yonder fork of the road, and there turn them loose."

The outlaws obeyed.

Buffalo Bill was pale, stern, silent and fearless.

A hundred yards along the overland trail the trail forked to the left, and, long before, had been used, until by cutting and washing, the hill had become utterly impassable.

Half a mile beyond, where it branched off, was the long and steep Breakneck Hill, and down this, where hardly a four-footed beast could pick its way, the bandit leader intended the horses should be driven, dragging the stage-coach after them.

"Now, Buffalo Bill, your life ends here," cried Boyd Bennett, savagely.

"All right, and the boys won't forget how I died," the reckless response.

"Turn 'em loose!" shouted the bandit leader.

The men at the bits sprung aside, blows were given the leaders, to set them going, yells and shouts frightened them, and the animals bounded away amid the shot of the cruel outlaws, the tramping of hoofs and the roar of the lumbering wheels.

And, dashing wildly after the flying coach went Buffalo Bill's faithful white, Chief, who had broken a leg from the outlaw holding him.

Not very far away from this scene of deviltry was the part of the outlaw leader, just about the time when the stage horses were turned loose for their wild flight. The horseman was crossing a tract of prairie, and heading across a line of hills, ragged, rugged and wild, that loomed before him.

Though alone upon the prairie, afar back in his flight were visible other horsemen upon his trail.

At first glance one might have thought it was a chase, the one in advance being pursued by the score of men in his rear; but a second look would have shown that was the difference in human nature and horseflesh, which caused a long space to separate the leader and his followers.

The rider was dressed in a cavalry fatigue suit, with pants stuck in boots, a slouch hat, pinned up with a bunch of crossed sabres, and a gold cord encircling it, while upon the shoulders of his jacket were straps, showing his rank to be that of a first lieutenant in the United States Army.

His face was daring to recklessness, and resolute to sternness, though there was a kindly look in the flashing eyes.

He was armed with cavalry sword and a pair of six-shooters.

"It is a little risky to strike the hills alone; but I'll take the chances, and enjoy the view until the men come up."

"If I am attacked by Indians or road agents, I can fight, or run for it," said the horseman, half aloud, peering cautiously ahead of him, he let his horse start the trail up into the hills.

The place where he halted afforded him a grand view of the sloping hill, the prairie, with his escort coming and far beyond, trees bordering a river.

Lost in contemplation of the beauties of nature, he suddenly started by loud yells and distant shots.

Instantly his reins were seized well in hand, and a large revolver drawn from the holster, while the horse was turned about as on a pivot, to face the danger, whatever it might be.

"Those were not Indian yells," he muttered, for

recognized the difference between a white man's shout and a redskin's war cry.

"Ah! I hear the sound of hoofs and wheels, and the shots and yells still continue."

Then the shots and sounds ceased, and yet the rapid clatter of hoofs was heard, and mingling with it the rumble and jar of swiftly-turning wheels.

"By Heaven! it is the stage coach!"

"And the team is running away, or flying from some danger."

Then there dashed into sight six gray horses, and with every evidence that they were flying in wild alarm.

"They are running away, and their driver has lost his nerve!"

"They will dash to destruction down this hill, for they are mad and blind with terror."

Then, raising his voice, he shouted in trumpet tones:

"Put on your brake! Drag hard on your lines, man, or you are lost!"

And back in clarion notes came the startling answer:

"See! I am bound hand and foot!"

"Buffalo Bill! by the gods of war!" shouted the horseman, recognizing the scout upon the box, and seeing now, what had before escaped him, that he was, indeed, bound, and that the reins were loosely swinging and fastened to the lantern.

At this discovery, the spurs had sunk into the flanks of his splendid thoroughbred, that bounded forward like a rocket; but, as though some second, sudden thought had flashed upon him, he reined the animal back with a force that brought him upon his haunches, and throwing forward the hand that held the revolver, said grimly:

"Now, Dick Danforth, prove your deadly aim, and save yonder noble man from death!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEADLY AIM.

The officer's face was placid, but firm, his eyes alone showing the intense pressure upon him, and he glanced at his pistol, to see that all was right, with the air of one who knew that life and death hung upon it alone.

Straight toward him the maddened horses were coming with a terrific rush of speed, and had even the bound man on the box then been able to seize the reins, no human strength could have checked them in the space between them and the hill.

Far back in the rear the keen eyes of the officer detected a band of horsemen.

They wore no uniforms, were not in buckskin, were not Indians, and could but be, in that lonely spot, and under the circumstances none other than the bandits of the overland.

A glance showed that his own men were yet a mile distant upon the prairie, but not an instant did he hesitate because he was alone.

He would first do what he could for the rescue of Buffalo Bill.

Perfectly calm was Buffalo Bill, though not a hundred yards now separated him from certain death, unless the gallant horseman in his front could save him.

Nearer the horses bounded, and when they had come within easy range, the finger touched the trigger and the flash and report followed.

With perfect presence of mind he had made his calculations.

Did he kill one of the leaders it would throw the others upon him and the stage would be hurled over and kill the bound scout upon the box.

Did he kill one of the wheel horses he would become a drag to the others, yet still be borne along at a slackened speed until his mate could be brought down, when those in advance would have their career greatly retarded, if not checked altogether, and if not, the other animals could be killed.

With the crack of his first shot the off-wheeler dropped, the stage swayed forward, sideways, and then was dragged on by the horses remaining, yet at a slackened pace.

With the second shot the other wheeler stumbled, staggered, half fell, regained his feet, and went down heavily.

Again the coach swayed badly; but the stout pole was kept up by the pressure of the draft of four horses upon it, and the heavy breast chains and traces held the two dead animals firmly attached to it, thus acting as a powerful drag upon the others and slackening their speed to a slow gallop, while the officer drove the spurs into his horse and darted forward.

Wheeling as he reached the leaders, he rode alongside of them, seized the reins, and dragged them back upon their haunches.

And not an instant too soon, for the brow of Breakneck Hill was not three lengths of the coach and team away.

But the horses were maddened with fright, and again sprung forward, and the lieutenant in vain drew on the reins with one hand, while with the other he held back his own excited animal.

"It is no use, sir; you'll have to drop another," said Buffalo Bill, with the utmost coolness, though they were nearing the hill rapidly.

"I wished to save the brutes, Cody, but it cannot be," was the equally calm rejoinder, and again the large "navy six" was drawn from its holster and one, two, shots followed almost together.

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Down in their tracks went the middle team, and the shock and weight dragged the leaders upon their haunches, while the stage coach rolled half on top of the slain animals and came to a sudden standstill.

"Quick, as you are alone, you had better fly, for see, yonder comes my foes!" cried Buffalo Bill, glancing back at the band now coming forward at a rapid run.

But Dick Danforth was no man to fly and leave a comrade in peril.

His escort was yet a long way off, he knew; Buffalo Bill was bound beyond quick release, and could not aid in beating back the bandits.

But his mind was made up as to what he should do, and with his hat in one hand and revolver in the other, he dashed directly toward the bandits, shouting in thrilling battle tones:

"Follow me, men, and cut these devils down!"

There was a sudden reining in of horses, and then came the cry:

"Hold, men! Fly for your lives! Troopers are upon us!"

Away the bandits darted, after a rattling fire of revolvers that did no harm, and with a light laugh Lieutenant Danforth galloped back to the coach, where the two leaders, now thoroughly cowed, stood panting and trembling.

Springing upon the box by the side of Buffalo Bill, he hastily cut his bonds and said:

"There, Cody, you are free, and my troopers will soon be along."

Turning upon the box where he stood, Buffalo Bill grasped the hand of his gallant rescuer, and said, impressively:

"Yes, I am free, and I owe my life to you, Lieutenant Danforth. When I forget this day, may Heaven forget me!"

Before the escort came up Lieutenant Dick Danforth told Buffalo Bill that news had reached Post Resistance that Captain Hinkley, the paymaster, was coming on Bud Sharkey's coach, and he had been sent with a guard to escort it to Fort Advance.

The Border King made known how he had hidden the treasure and of his adventure with Boyd Bennett, the outlaw leader, and added:

"I have much to even up with him; but I have my horse, and they did not take my weapons, strange to say, so we'll get the money, hitch up some of your escort's horses, send the coach on under a small guard and then take the trail of Bennett and his gang, if you say so, lieutenant."

"You bet I say so, Cody," was the answer.

And this plan was carried out, though, after a couple of days, the pursuit of the outlaws had to be given up and the return made to Fort Advance, as Danforth's force

was far too small to pursue them into the Indian country, for there the trail led, and it was known that Boyd Bennett, at least, if not all of his men, was a renegade and ally of the Sioux.

CHAPTER XVI.

BUFFALO BILL MAKES A DISCOVERY.

The welcome that greeted the Border King upon his return to Fort Advance proved to him how well he stood in the hearts of all, and the men were loud in their thanks for his having saved their money.

"You are indeed the king of men on this border, Cody, and if you would only accept a commission you could readily get it," said Major Baldwin.

The troopers had told the story. Captain Hinkley and his men had been buried, and all were most revengeful toward Boyd Bennett and his band.

Ten days after his return from this unsuccessful search for the outlaws, Lieutenant Danforth and a number of cavalrymen again set out to try and find the band.

Buffalo Bill was then away on a scouting trail with Texas Jack, the two going separate ways, but to meet at a given time at a certain place.

For a week had the Border King been on the trail without success, and he was thinking of going to meet Texas Jack, when he came suddenly upon a spectacle in a little valley that nearly stopped the beating of his heart, so appalling was the scene he had ridden upon.

Stern, white-faced men were there, over a score in number, lying where they had fallen in a battle for life.

There they lay, half-stripped of their uniforms, robbed of their weapons after death, and lying amid their foes, hideous, painted savage Indians, whom their red comrades, in their flight from the fearful scene, had not borne off to burial, though they had found time to tear the dearly-prized scallock from the heads of their pale-face enemies.

A trooper or two, a redskin, an officer, a chief, a caparisoned steed, an Indian pony, all dead they lay, here, there, in the valley, near the river.

And upon this sickening sight, where death reigned supreme, where Lieutenant Dick Danforth and his gallant troopers still held the field, though slain, Buffalo Bill came, just as the sun neared the ridge of the distant hills.

He had been following a well-marked trail to suddenly have this scene of carnage burst upon him.

So suddenly did the scene break upon him, so unexpected the sight that met his gaze, that, man of iron heart and nerves of steel though he was, he fairly reeled in his saddle, and, reining his horse back upon his haunches, with cruel drag upon the bit, he covered his face with his hands, as though to shut out the appalling spectacle.

An instant only did the scout show this weakness, and then his face was turned upon the red field that had come like some fearful dream upon his view.

White faced as the dead, with eyes that fairly burned with the fire of rage, lips that were livid and quivering, and hands that trembled, he looked for one full minute upon what lay before him.

No movement of man or beast came, as he had hoped, to prove that life yet remained, that Death's icy touch had not stilled every pulse.

No; he felt, he knew, when he saw the scalpless heads of those that lay nearest him, that the red work had been complete.

He uttered no word, but, dismounting, took from off his head the broad sombrero he wore, and with respectful tread moved forward.

Slowly his horse followed on his tracks, his ears pricked up, his eyes flashing, and nostrils distended, as he invaded the sacred Valley of Death.

From dead to dead the horseman went, his eyes eagerly scanning every face.

At last his eye fell upon a heap of slain upon a slight knoll and at the base of a low rock.

His gaze scanned the field quickly then, and he seemed to feel that there would be found the one he sought, for it was evident that in that spot the end had come, the last act of the fearful drama had been played, and that the curtain of doom had fallen upon the remnant of that gallant band, to rise no more for them in life.

A few steps more, and he reached the spot he had sought, and a groan issued from between his shut teeth, and he bowed his uncovered head with grief and reverence commingled.

There, resting in an attitude that showed he had sunk down fighting to the last, lay Danforth.

The left hand grasped the barrel of a revolver, which showed that its charges had been emptied and that it had been clubbed to use at close quarters, while the right held his sword-hilt, and the blade was buried in the body of a painted chief, and was probably the last act of the dying leader of the slaughtered troopers.

About him lay their foes, piled in heaps around their last rally.

"Danforth dead!"

"Indian work this is, but back of it there is a pale-face hand, and I mean to ferret out this red deed and bring retribution on whom retribution should justly fall."

Like trumpet tones his words had rung out, the storm following the calm.

And then he dropped upon one knee, and, raising his hand toward Heaven, he said, in a voice that quivered with sorrow and passion:

"Yes, here upon this red field, by the dead body of him who saved my life, I swear revenge."

Having uttered his oath upon bended knee, he sprang suddenly to his feet, as there fell upon his ears a human voice, crying in threatening tones:

"And I swear, Buffalo Bill, that you shall never keep the oath your lips have just uttered!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SCALPLOCK.

The words that broke upon the ears of Buffalo Bill, as he stood there surrounded by the dead, and believing himself the only living human being near, fell like a voice from the tomb, and for once the noted plainsman was momentarily unnerved.

But when his eyes fell upon the speaker, and he saw that he had an old and deadly foe to deal with, and he heard the threatening words, he instantly became himself again, and said, in a tone that was reckless in its indifference:

"Well, we meet again, and, as before, you hold the trump card, for you have me covered, I see, Boyd Ben-net."

The man he addressed stood within five feet of him, and held a rifle covering his heart.

To all appearances he was an Indian chief, for he was bedecked with feathers, his face was hideously painted, and he wore the full attire of a redskin, from moccasins to war bonnet.

At his back, with rifles and arrows covering the scout, were a score of braves, who had, with the stealthy tread of panthers, followed their leader to the spot where Buffalo Bill knelt over the body of Danforth, and well did the scout know that he was at the mercy of his foes.

"You know me, then, Buffalo Bill?" asked the man whose words had so startled him.

"Yes, even beneath your paint and feathers, I recognize the black heart," was the fearless reply of the scout.

"Have a care, scout, for every word of insult you heap upon me shall be a burning coal upon your head when you come to die."

"Yes, when I come to die; but I am one who carries the belief, you accursed renegade, that while there is life there is hope."

"That belief will do you no good now."

"Bah! a barking dog never bites," was the contemptuous reply.

The renegade looked as though he was about to shoot the scout in his tracks, but he caught sight of a smile upon his face, and, not understanding it, refrained, while he said:

"You must have help at hand, or you would not be thus defiant, Buffalo Bill."

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"No; I am all alone, and he who once saved me from your vengeance lies stark and dead before you there."

"Look upon him, man! Look upon these brave men who lie about him, silent in death, and let your coward heart cringe, that you, a white man, should have aided the redskins in this red, devilish work."

Buffalo Bill spoke impetuously, and his eyes flashed fire as he bent them upon the renegade, who did for a moment cower at the words of the scout.

But the next instant, with a shrug of the shoulders, he said:

"I was white once, Bill Cody, and my own blood-kindred cast me adrift in the world——"

"Your own crimes," sneered Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, I did sin, and for it I was treated with no mercy, and, that I might not die in prison, I came to this boundless land."

"The world owed me a living, and it gave me none, so I took to horse-stealing, and then to stage robbing, and you made the overland trail so hot for me that I had to become a renegade."

"I swore to have revenge on you, and once that man, that corpse, saved you from my well-planned scheme to see you die, and I vowed that he, too, should feel the weight of my hatred."

"You have kept that oath, you accursed renegade," said Buffalo Bill, with savage earnestness.

"He dared come here, near the village of the Sioux, and he and his soldiers were beaten back, overwhelmed and crushed."

"And not one left to tell the story; no prisoners taken?"

"Oh, no! Chief Oak Heart wanted no prisoners from Danforth's band, and all who charged in here with him are dead, and their scalps adorn the belts of many a gallant brave."

"And you fought with the Sioux?" added the scout.

"Yes; and killed as they killed, without mercy."

"And you do not fear to admit it?"

"Why should I, for am I not speaking to one who will soon be dead?" was the reply.

"It looks that way, I do not deny, Boyd Bennett; but answer me one question:

"Did you kill Lieutenant Dick Danforth, one of the noblest and bravest men who ever wore a sword, and whom I loved as I would a brother?"

"I am sorry to say that I did not."

"You know who killed him?"

"Yes, I know; it was Chief Red Knife."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, but simply smiled, and the renegade asked:

"Would you know why I have returned here?"

"Yes; why have you dared come back here among the sacred dead?"

"I will tell you. Oak Heart refused to allow Red Knife or any other chief to take the scalp of Danforth, for he fought like a fiend."

"God bless the old red sinner for that," fervently said Buffalo Bill.

"But I am Death Killer, the Medicine Chief, and I have come back myself to take the scallock from the head of the man against whom I swore revenge."

"Boyd Bennett, accursed though you be, with a heart blacker than the vilest redskin can boast of, you will not do this wrong," cried Buffalo Bill, his voice trembling with emotion.

"You are mistaken, Cody," was the cool rejoinder.

"I called to a few of my braves to follow me, and rode back to take that scallock."

"I saw you coming hither, and I knew I could not be mistaken in your handsome face and elegant form, and, leaving our ponies, we dogged your steps, and you were too much cast down with grief to know your danger."

"See, I am here, and you are my prisoner, and when you have seen me tear the trophy from yonder head, then will I wring a cry of mercy from your stern lips, Buffalo Bill."

"Never! if this be my last act on earth!"

With his ringing words, Buffalo Bill suddenly jerked a revolver from his belt, and, throwing it forward, fired with the quickness of a flash.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WHITE ANTELOPE.

So rapid and unexpected had been the movement of Buffalo Bill, in drawing his revolver and firing it, that not one of the warriors, who stood behind their renegade chief, some with arrows fitted to their bows, and others with rifles covering the heart of the scout, had time to fire.

And not even Boyd Bennett himself, who had his weapon pointed at Buffalo Bill, had an instant to touch the trigger before the act, flash and report came almost together.

And yet, swift as had been the act of the scout, one eye had been quick enough to send an arrow upon its errand, and striking the outstretched arm of Buffalo Bill, just as his finger touched the trigger, it buried itself there and by the shock destroyed his unerring aim.

But, having made the daring move, and knowing that death must follow his deed, Buffalo Bill dropped his left hand upon his second revolver, determined to press the fight and die, as had the gallant man who lay at his feet.

Maddened with rage, and thirsting for the life of his foe, Boyd Bennett shouted to his warriors to rush upon

the scout and take him alive, that he might end his career by cruel torture.

But suddenly a slender form darted before the red braves, and with an arrow set in readiness to let fly, covered them, while there came in the Sioux tongue:

"Let the Sioux braves stand back!"

"The White Antelope commands it!"

Like one man, they halted and gazed upon the one who had so commanded them.

And Buffalo Bill, too, riveted his eyes upon the one who had sprung between him and certain death, though he knew full well that the arrow buried in his arm had been sent from the bow he now beheld bent upon his foes.

It was a woman that he saw, or rather a young girl, for she was scarcely over seventeen.

Her form was slender and graceful, and her face bore the unmistakable stamp of having other than Indian blood flowing in her veins.

Buffalo Bill's long life upon the prairies had made him a skeptic in regard to Indian beauty, and yet he could not but admit that the one before him was beautiful.

Why was she there he did not know, but there was one remarkable feature about her that told him who she was.

Long, luxurious hair, every strand of golden hue, contrasted strangely with her complexion of bronze, and eyes as black as ebony.

The scout had heard of such a girl in the head village of the Sioux, and that she was revered and feared by every Indian of the tribe.

For this reason she was called the Sioux Queen, though her real name was White Antelope.

And she was here on the red field the warriors of her tribe had made.

While these thoughts were flashing through Cody's mind, the renegade spoke, addressing the maiden, who still held her threatening attitude.

"Why has the White Antelope become the friend of the slayer of her people, for the man before her is *Pa-e-has-ka*, the Killer?"

"The arrow of the White Antelope still sticks in the arm of the *Pa-e-has-ka*."

"Is that the way an Indian treats a friend?" asked the young girl, with scorn in look and tone.

"Then the White Antelope yields the pale-face foe of her people to the Medicine Chief of her tribe?"

"No!" was the decided response.

"What would the maiden do?" asked the renegade with surprise.

"She would herself carry *Pa-e-has-ka* to her tribe."

"The White Antelope is no warrior," sneered the renegade.

"She has just saved the life of the pale-face Medicine Chief of her tribe," was the calm retort.

At this Buffalo Bill laughed lightly, for he saw that the shot went home, and his seeming indifference to his peril caused her to turn her eyes upon him.

The look was not a stare, it was more, and she scanned him from head to foot.

What was in her thoughts none could tell; but, as though having decided upon her course of action, she stepped boldly to the side of Buffalo Bill, and drew the arrow out of his arm, where it had passed partially through it.

The scout never winced at the pain, and baring his arm, she bound it up with a piece of soft buckskin, not a word being spoken the while, though the renegade and his braves watched her intently.

"Is not that act of the White Antelope one of friendship for the pale-face?" asked the renegade, when she had dressed the wound as well as she was able to do under the circumstances.

The Indian girl made no reply to the renegade, but asked, addressing Buffalo Bill:

"Is the pale-face *Pa-e-has-ka*?"

"So the Indians call me," was the response.

"Why is he here?"

"I came on the trail of that renegade pale-face there, and found here the dead chief, my friend," answered Buffalo Bill, speaking in perfect Sioux, and pointing to the dead Danforth, whose stern face looked almost life-like in the glow of the declining sun, which fell upon it.

"Where are the pale-face brothers of the *Pa-e-has-ka*?"

Buffalo Bill pointed in the direction from whence he had come, and said:

"Far away."

"The White Antelope is his foe, and the foe of his people; but she wishes not to see the wolves and the vultures tear the pale-faces in pieces, and she will let the *Pa-e-has-ka* go to bring his warriors to bury them."

"You've got the heart to do it, I believe, if you have the nerve to carry it out," said Buffalo Bill, bluntly, while the renegade cried, savagely:

"No, you shall not leave this spot alive, Bill Cody."

"We'll see who wears the breeches in this family, Boyd Bennett," laughed Buffalo Bill, as though amused, in spite of his peril, and he continued, in Sioux:

"Now, it's your put, my redskin beauty."

Without noticing the remark of the renegade, the maiden continued:

"But the *Pa-e-has-ka* must make the White Antelope a promise."

"I'll do it."

"The White Antelope came from the great chief, Oak

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Heart, who told her to seek the pale-face warriors and tell them where to find their dead braves.

"He bids them come here and bury their dead, and not follow on the trail of his people."

"Will the *Pa-e-has-ka* tell his big chief the words of the Oak Heart?"

"I will."

"And will he then come back and be a captive of the Oak Heart?"

She looked him straight in the eye as she asked the question, and Buffalo Bill saw that she meant just what she said; but he asked:

"Does the White Antelope mean that I am to return to her people after I have guided the soldiers here to see the red work of her braves?"

"She has spoken."

"And this is the promise she wishes *Pa-e-has-ka* to make her?"

The Indian girl nodded.

"Why should he return?"

"He is the captive of the Medicine Chief now, but White Antelope lets him go free that his pale-face braves may not lie here unburied, and that the other warriors of his people may take warning not to follow upon the trail of the Oak Heart."

"Will he promise to do this, and then come to the village of the Sioux?"

Buffalo Bill was silent an instant.

If he refused, he knew that she would not protect him from the renegade.

If he promised, he would keep the promise, be the end what it might.

But the promise bade fair to help him out of the present difficulty, and he would make it.

But he made a mental reservation, too, and that was that after bearing the tidings to the fort, and delivering Oak Heart's warning, he would go on to the Indian village, but with a force at his back that would surprise the redskins.

"I promise the White Antelope," he said.

"He'll not keep his pledge," cried the renegade.

"The *Pa-e-has-ka* is the foe of my people, but his tongue is straight," said the maiden.

"But he will come with a force at his back that will burn the Sioux villages and kill her people."

Buffalo Bill saw the girl start at this, and gave the renegade credit for having divined his purpose.

"If the *Pa-e-has-ka* will do this, he must remain now a captive to the Medicine Chief," she said, in an injured tone.

"Don't believe that old liar, White Antelope, for the *Pa-e-has-ka* will come alone," answered Buffalo Bill.

"The White Antelope will believe the White Chief,

"He is a great scout, and can find the trail of Oak Heart

"Now let him go."

"By Heaven! Buffalo Bill, you leave not this spot alive," cried Boyd Bennett, savagely, and he again covered the scout with his rifle.

CHAPTER XIX.

GIRL'S WORD.

The moment that Boyd Bennett gave utterance to the threat, Buffalo Bill had placed himself upon his guard by instantly drawing his revolvers and held one covering the renegade, for he had replaced them in his belt during his conversation with the girl.

His arm had recovered from the shock of the arrow blow, and he had good use of it, though it pained him.

At the same instant the girl had also covered the renegade with her bow and arrow, and aimed straight at his heart, while the warrior band, which had been silent through all, and had stood like statues, at the action of their chief and Buffalo Bill, at once brought their rifles and arrows to an aim upon the latter.

Thus they stood amid the dead soldiers and Sioux, which a movement of any one might precipitate into a deadly encounter.

Buffalo Bill, though pale, was stern and determined, and, though he could see the act of the Indian girl was friendly to him, he kept his eyes riveted upon the renegade.

For an instant, which seemed a long, long time, this lasted, and then the scout broke the silence with the sneering words :

"Why do you not bring that finger to the trigger of your rifle, Boyd Bennett, for it won't go off otherwise?"

The girl understood English, and, seeing that the scout dared the renegade to move, she said quickly :

"The White Antelope tells the braves of her tribe to turn their arrows and rifles from the heart of the Killer."

The command came in a tone that was firm, and, to the surprise and delight of Buffalo Bill, it was at once obeyed.

That Boyd Bennett, the renegade, had expected as much was evident from his manner, for he made no effort to resist, fully recognizing the uselessness of so doing, for, though the warriors belonged to his own band, as Medicine Chief, yet he knew the power of the young girl was greater than any one else, even to the authority of Oak Heart.

"Redskins, you are trumps, and the girl holds a full hand of you, and plays you well," said Buffalo Bill, with one of his light laughs that were apparently reckless of consequences.

"The laugh is yours now, Buffalo Bill, but my time will yet come," hissed the renegade.

"Oh! I can't expect to laugh always, Bennett; but," and the scout spoke once more in the Sioux tongue, so that the braves could understand him:

"Let the renegade pale face meet me now in personal combat, and then his revenge, or mine, can be settled."

The look upon the faces of the warriors proved that this was a proposition that tickled them, and they said a few words together in a low tone, and looked toward their chief for a reply.

As for the renegade it did not strike him favorably, for his face was an index of what he thought; but he was no coward, vile as he was, and dared not refuse to face the scout, did he wish to hold influence with the Indians.

Though confident of his own strength and prowess, however, he yet knew too much of Buffalo Bill to care to meet him with either revolver or knife.

But the challenge had been hurled in his teeth, and live or die he must accept the alternative, and he said grimly:

"The redskin slayer has spoken well.

"We will fight."

"The White Antelope says no," said the Indian girl, facing the renegade.

Her motive Buffalo Bill could not understand any more than could the renegade.

They had not met before, he held no claim upon her that he was aware of.

But she had said no in a tone that showed she meant it.

This very refusal caused the renegade to urge it on, while Buffalo Bill remained silent.

"No, the White Antelope says the *Pa-e-has-ka* shall not fight," she repeated.

"The Death Killer will give the White Antelope the scalp of her foe to carry to her people," urged the renegade.

"The white hunter would carry the scalp of the Medicine Chief at his belt," was the reply, and Buffalo Bill said, banteringly:

"That's just what I would do, Bennett, and I tell you also, though White Antelope prevents our meeting now, I'll be on your trail like a wolf, and yet nail your scalp on my cabin door as a warning to horse thieves, stage robbers and renegades."

The last words were spoken earnestly, and the girl saw that they hit hard, so she said quickly:

"Let the Killer go to his chief and his braves.

"His horse is there," and she pointed to the well-trained animal waiting near.

"I will do as the White Antelope says, for there seems

no chance of a fight here; but will the redskin girl let this white wretch take the scalp of my brother there?"

He pointed to the body of Danforth as he spoke.

"No; the Medicine Chief will return on the trail with the White Antelope."

"And his braves?"

"His warriors will go, too!"

"If it's just the same, Miss Antelope, suppose you all light out now, and I will then start to my people, for I can see that that accursed renegade itches to secure a trophy that even Oak Heart would not allow his warriors to touch."

"The white hunter has told the White Antelope that he will come to the village of the Oak Heart?"

"Yes; when I have guided my warriors here."

"*Pa-e-has-ka's* tongue is straight?" she asked.

"Not a crook or a curl in it," was the smiling response.

"The White Antelope will trust him.

"Let the Medicine Chief and his braves come."

The renegade muttered an oath, and a threat, and then followed the Indian girl, his warriors stalking slowly after him.

Buffalo Bill watched them until they disappeared in the distance, and then muttered:

"Though dead, gallant Danforth, you still hold the field."

CHAPTER XX.

THE MAD HUNTER.

In the valley a cavalry command was encamped, a few hours after the battle where Danforth and his men fell to rise no more.

It was not yet sunset, but the troopers had ridden hard, and the order to encamp had been given at an early hour, when the command came upon a spot for a bivouac, and the guide reported that the ridge before them afforded no good camping-ground.

The horses were soon lariated out, and scores of camp fires were kindled along the banks of the stream, while the soldiers began to prepare for the coming night as best they could.

Leaving his servant to prepare his frugal supper, the leader of the soldier band strode up the hillside toward the summit of the ridge, as though to get a better view of the country about, while daylight yet remained.

"Be careful, captain, for I look for Injuns hereabouts at any time," called the guide, who was Texas Jack.

"All right, Jack, I'll call if I run upon any redskins," answered the fearless officer, and he strode on alone up the hill.

Once or twice he turned to enjoy the scene of beauty laid out before him, with the lovely valley and the picturesque bivouac, and at last, just as the sun sunk near

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the top of a distant and lofty range of hills, he reached a point from whence he could behold the country over which the morrow's trail would lead him.

Below him all was shadow, for the sun had set to those in the valley; but the hilltops were bathed in golden light, and, unconsciously speaking aloud, he said:

"No wonder that the poor redskins love this land so well that they fight for it."

"Well said, officer! But I've got the drop on you."

The officer started as the voice broke upon his ears, and, dropping his hand upon his sword-hilt, turned to face the speaker.

Before him, and not six paces distant, having but just stepped out from a dense thicket, he beheld what at first appeared to be hardly human.

And yet none other was near, and from the lips of the one upon whom his eyes rested had fallen the words that had told him he was not alone.

"Who or what are you?" asked the officer, sternly, his eyes fixed upon the intruder, and beholding a man of giant size, clad in the skins of wild beasts, that had at first caused him to appear like a huge grizzly bear reared upon his hind legs for an attack upon his foe.

About his waist was a red foxskin belt, in which were two revolvers and a large knife, upon his head was a panther-skin cap, the tail hanging down the back, and upon his feet were moccasins of black bear skin.

Hair black as night, falling to his waist, beard of the same hue, matted and unkempt, and a revolver held in his left hand and covering the officer, made up the appearance of the being that had so unexpectedly appeared.

A glance had shown the officer a dark, haggard face, with eyes of strange blackness and brightness gazing straight into his own.

In hoarse, deep tones the strange being said, while he still held his revolver at a level, and in a hand that had not the slightest tremor: "You ask who or what I am?"

"Yes," and the soldier watched him with the eye of a hawk, hoping for some chance to draw a revolver, which would place him on more equal terms with his giant foe, for such he felt assured he would prove.

"A madman!"

The answer was fairly shouted.

In spite of himself the officer started at the savage response but said, in a kindly tone:

"My poor man, put up your weapon and go with me to my camp, and I will care for you."

"Never!" was the savage reply.

"But, my dear fellow——"

"Hold! Address no words of kindness to me, for they are thrown away upon one whose duty it is to kill."

"Have you ever heard of the Mad Hunter?"

"I have heard of such a character."

"I am the Mad Hunter, and if you know of me you will understand that my mission is to kill, and mercy I show to none, not even one who wears the uniform you do."

"No, no, I spare neither my own race, for I am a white man, or was, before I became as a wild beast, and red-skin, too, is my foe."

"All are alike to me."

The man spoke with intensity, though not a muscle moved, and the iron hand still held the revolver at a level, covering the officer's heart.

"But how have I harmed you, my poor man?"

"You are human, and all mankind are my foes," was the trembling response, and then he cried out, in a louder tone:

"Come, the night draws near, and I have yet to run down my game for my supper."

"Come! If you know prayers, say them, for before the sun sinks wholly behind these hills, I drop you dead in your tracks."

The officer saw that the madman was a giant in strength, as well as size, and many strange stories of the Mad Hunter had been told around the camp fires.

To cope with him he knew would be impossible, and a movement toward drawing his revolver, with which he was armed, would be the signal for his death.

In full view below him was the bivouac of his men, the camp fires burning brightly in the gathering gloom; but to call for aid would precipitate the end, and he waited in silence, hoping some freak of the madman's humor might save him.

If the Mad Hunter kept his word, he knew he had few minutes to live, and to see how near the sun was to disappearing behind the hills, he turned his eyes in that direction.

Instantly his face flushed, and with hope, for his gaze fell upon the form of a horse and rider.

They were a long way off, and upon the spur of a hill, and just where the sunlight fell upon them, revealing both distinctly.

The horseman had been evidently about to descend to the valley, when his eyes fell upon the scene upon the opposite hill, and, though the madman and his intended victim were far away, he seemed to understand at a glance what was taking place, and instantly he drew rein, just as he was recognized by the officer, who unconsciously allowed his name to break from his lips in a quick, hopeful whisper:

"Buffalo Bill!"

The keen ear of the Mad Hercules caught the name, and, turning like a tiger at bay, his gaze fell upon the scout on the distant spur.

Quick as a flash, as he turned, the officer had dropped his hand upon his revolver and jerked it from his belt.

Throwing it forward he drew trigger, and the hammer fell with a click upon the nipple, no report following.

But the sound caused the madman to turn upon him once more, and the officer saw him bound upon him, throwing aside his pistol as he did so, and drawing his knife in his wild passion to kill.

But, even in that awful moment the officer's eyes turned upon the distant spur, and he beheld the rifle rise to the horseman's shoulder, and knew that, desperate as were the chances, Buffalo Bill intended risking a shot to save him.

CHAPTER XXI.

BUFFALO BILL'S SHOT.

In that instant, after the hammer of his revolver fell without causing an explosion, the officer remembered that only that morning he had cleaned his weapons thoroughly, and not having the cartridges near him just then, had slipped them into his belt, intending to load them as he rode along on the march.

Had he not forgotten to do so, brave and nervy man that he was, added to the fact that he was a dead shot, he could have killed the Mad Hunter.

Realizing the uselessness of his revolvers, he at once whipped out his sword to meet the ferocious attack, although with little hope of contesting against the madman with any degree of success.

He had recognized in the horseman, as his horse stood on the spur, when the glimmer of sunlight rested upon him, one whom he knew as the King of Bordermen, Buffalo Bill.

He saw, too, in that moment of peril, that Buffalo Bill had caught sight of the scene upon the ridge, when the Mad Hunter was springing upon him, the sun's setting rays revealed the difference between the two distinctly.

The one look of the officer, as he stood on guard to meet the attack, though he could but know how it must end, showed to him that Buffalo Bill had suddenly thrown his rifle to his shoulder, and that the muzzle pointed toward them.

Fearful, indeed, were the chances against him; but Buffalo Bill was the man to take just such a chance.

And he did take it. Just as the blade of the madman was poised above the head of the daring officer, whose nerve did not fail him, there came the puff of smoke from the scout's rifle, and down upon his face the madman fell, heavily, burying his knife deep into the earth, and with a red streak across the top of the head where the bullet had cut its way.

"Bravo! bravo Buffalo Bill! I owe you my life, and

Heaven knows I never fought at closer quarters with death," said the officer, as he gazed an instant upon the huge, fallen form, and then turning toward the spur, where he had last seen the scout, he took off his hat and waved it thrice around his head, while he gave a ringing shout.

But the spur was already vacated, and up from the shadows came an answering cry, while he could see the horse and rider making for the valley.

His shout remained unnoticed in the bivouac of his men, doubtless drowned by the noise of the camp; but the clatter of the hoofs of the scout's horse came distinctly to his ears, and soon after he beheld the animal mounting the hillside toward him, and his daring rider urging him on.

With rapid bounds he came from the shadows below into the glimmering twilight above, and, drawing rein, the scout threw himself from his horse and confronted the officer.

"Cody, God bless you!"

"Captain Ed. Keyes!"

Such were the words from the lips of the two men, as their hands were clasped in warm and friendly greeting.

"Always in the right place, just when you are wanted, Bill."

"I came pretty near being in the wrong place, for that was a long way off to take the chances, as I feared I might kill you; but it looks like the Great American What-Is-It that I have knocked over," and Buffalo Bill turned to the prostrate form of the madman, while Captain Keyes said:

"It is the poor creature they call the Mad Hunter, and whose existence I half believed was only in the imaginations of old trappers, until to-day, Cody."

"I have heard of him, sir, and they say that he was a cruel demon; but I guess his evil works have ended."

"Now, sir, I have sad, sad news to make known to you, and I was seeking the fort, when I saw you, and, as I at first believed, a grizzly bear."

"It was worse, Cody; but what news have you?"

"Quick! tell me, has Oak Heart caught Danforth?"

"You have said it, for the gallant fellow and his men have been wiped out."

"Great God!" and the brave and noble-hearted Keyes, who never flinched under the fiercest fire and deadliest danger, fairly staggered under the blow, while his voice trembled as he asked:

"Can this be true, Cody?"

"I saw Danforth and his men dead on the field, sir," was the sad reply.

"Then there can be no doubt; but when and where?"

"A couple of hours' ride from the village of Oak Heart.

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"They were surrounded and overwhelmed, but fought to the end with desperate courage, as every trace shows.

"I came upon the field this afternoon, and left it an hour after to go to the fort, and make known the fearful tidings, and at the same time deliver the warning of Oak Heart to those who follow on his trail."

"Ha! did you see that wily old chief?"

"No; but one who represented him," and Buffalo Bill went on to tell the strange story of his visit to the fatal field and all that had occurred to him, while the two descended to the valley together, the scout's horse slowly following, and the Mad Hunter, seemingly forgotten, left lying where he had fallen.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BORDER KING'S PLEDGE.

Buffalo Bill was hastening to find Texas Jack, and report what had happened in the valley, and then send him on to the fort, while he returned to bury the dead lieutenant and his men, when he saw the danger of Captain Keyes.

From the latter he learned that Lieutenant Danforth had had a dream of seeing him, Cody, a prisoner of the Sioux, and he had urged Major Baldwin to allow him to take a score of men to discover if it was true.

Realizing Danforth's reckless nature, Major Baldwin, the day after the party left, had ordered Captain Edward L. Keyes with two troops of cavalry and a dozen scouts to go on the trail of the young officer, and also to look the Border King and Texas Jack up.

On the way, only that afternoon, they had met Texas Jack and he reported that he was to meet Buffalo Bill the next day, but he had not seen Lieutenant Danforth and his men, yet had come upon their trail, and was sorry to see it leading so near to Chief Oak Heart's village.

And the captain's meeting with Buffalo Bill had revealed the sad story of the fate of Danforth and his men.

With him Captain Keyes had over a hundred troopers, a company of mounted infantry, and two mountain guns, numbering, with the artillerymen and scouts, nearly two hundred, a strong flying column that could move rapidly and stand off a big force of Indians.

They were then encamped in the valley, and not a dozen miles from the village of Oak Heart.

It was a pleasant surprise to see Buffalo Bill come into camp with Captain Keyes.

Orders had been given for the men to turn in early, for a start would be made before dawn; but for once, unheeding discipline, the soldiers sat around the campfires talking in low, earnest tones of the fearful tidings brought by the scout, and many a suppressed oath of vengeance was made by those who knew the gallant dead.

The officers had breathlessly listened to the scout's story of what had suddenly burst upon his amazed and horrified vision.

The scene there, with the renegade Bennett and his warriors, the saving of his life by White Antelope, who wounded him with an arrow to do so—for, had he killed the white medicine chief, his death would have followed—and, at last, his pledge to deliver himself up, were all made known, while the surgeon skillfully dressed his wound.

"But you certainly do not intend to keep your pledge, Cody?" said Captain Keyes, noticing the earnest manner of the scout.

"I certainly do intend to keep it," was the low reply.

At this every officer was upon his feet, gazing at the scout in amazement, and real indignation, that he should think of keeping a promise so made.

"By the gods of war, but they'll burn you at the stake, Bill!" cried a young officer.

"Why, you, of all men, Cody, the Sioux are anxious to get into their power," cried another.

"I know that they are anxious to make my more intimate acquaintance, gentlemen, and I intend to give them the chance," was the calm reply of Buffalo Bill.

"Never, Cody!"

"But, I——"

"I will hear no buts, Cody, for if you persist in your foolish intention of keeping your word, made to an Indian girl and a renegade, I will put you under arrest," said Keyes.

"I'm afraid I'll grow gray in the guard house, then."

"I forbid you to return to the redskins' camp, because you were forced to make a promise to save your life."

"I must remain firm in my determination, sir, for if I take big chances in going to Oak Heart's camp, I also hope to accomplish a purpose I have in mind."

The officers all saw that the scout was determined in his purpose, and had some object in view which he cared not to make known to them; but Captain Keyes said:

"Cody, I owe to you my life, and in the past, services I can never repay, and if, even by the harshest means, I can keep you from making a fool of yourself and losing your life, I intend to do so."

"Every man on this border, who is your foe, knows what Buffalo Bill is, and I intend that you shall know what a friend is."

Buffalo Bill laughed lightly, and before he could reply, a sergeant entered and saluted.

"Well, sergeant?"

"He is not there, sir."

"Who is not there, sergeant?"

"The madman, sir."

"Ha! I remember, you went in the place of Murphy, to bring the body of the madman into camp?"

"Yes, sir," answered the sergeant.

"And you say that the body was not there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you go up to the top of the ridge?"

"Yes, sir, and along the top of it on each side of where the trail led."

"And searched thoroughly?"

"I did, sir, and so did the eight men I had with me."

"This is strange, Cody, for you certainly killed the madman," and Keyes turned to the scout, who responded:

"I shot to kill him, and aimed at his head; but he may be as much like a grizzly as he looks, and hard to slay."

"I will go up on the ridge with the sergeant, and see if he found the right spot."

"Do so, Cody, if you are not too tired, for I confess that I would prefer that mad giant should rather be dead than alive."

Buffalo Bill left the tent, and accompanied by the sergeant and his squad, went toward the hills, leaving the officers still discussing the sad tidings they had heard of Danforth and his men.

In half an hour the sergeant returned, and alone.

"Where is the scout, sergeant?" asked the captain, quickly.

"He left us upon the ridge, sir."

"Left you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And where did he go?" and Captain Keyes seemed anxiously to await the reply.

"We did not find the madman, sir; or any trace of him, and Mr. Cody sent one of my men to camp after his horse, and rode away, telling me to say to you, sir, that he would try and see if he couldn't get his grip upon the Mad Hunter, or Oak Heart, before he saw you again."

"By the gods of war, he has gone!" cried the captain, in a tone of real distress, for he feared that Buffalo Bill, to keep his word to White Antelope, had rashly gone to his death.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TRACKING THE MAD MAN.

That Buffalo Bill was intensely surprised, upon reaching the spot where he knew the Mad Hunter to have fallen, to find him gone, there is no doubt.

The aim he had taken had been a quick one, the distance great, and he had barely time to see a huge being, clothed in hair, rushing, knife in hand, upon one whose uniform proved him to be an officer.

He saw how bravely that officer faced his foe, sword in hand, and he raised his rifle and sent his bullet upon its unerring way.

Arriving at the spot afterward, he had not for a moment doubted that his aim was fatal, for a glance had shown him the huge head marked with a red stain, and the tidings of which he was the bearer had sunk the madman in their importance and horror, and only upon arriving at the bivouac had Captain Keyes sent back after the body.

Buffalo Bill knew there was no mistaking the spot where the Mad Hunter had fallen, and yet he was not there.

He had disappeared. Had he friends near, who had seen the encounter, and then borne him off?

After a moment's thought he felt that this could not be, for he remembered that in all the stories he had heard of the Mad Hunter it was never said that he had a companion, and that he made war upon all human beings alike.

At any rate, being out of the encampment, Buffalo Bill determined to remain away, and, as the sergeant reported, sent for his horse.

Riding away in the darkness, he did not go very far, but went into a lonely camp for the night, and in full view of the campfires of the soldiers.

Knowing that the soldiers would leave before dawn, and push on to the valley with all rapidity, he did not fear being discovered in the darkness, and, after looking to the comfort of his horse, rolled himself in his blanket and lay down to seek slumber.

He was awakened by the moving of the command over the ridge; but, remaining quiet, as it was yet dark, he sunk to sleep again, and never awoke until the rising sun sent its rays into his face.

The scout was a man who always traveled well provided with provisions, and his breakfast was by no means a light repast, while he ate it with a will that showed that he had the strength to demand a generous meal.

Then saddling his horse, he mounted and rode along the ridge to where the military command had crossed.

The last soldier had been for some time out of sight, having disappeared in the recesses of the distant range of hills, and Buffalo Bill then set to work to solve the mysterious disappearance of the Mad Hunter.

Thorough plainsman as he was, it did not take him long to discover that his shot had not been fatal, and that the madman had left of his own accord.

How seriously he was wounded he could not tell, so followed the large-footed trail along the ridge, then down into the valley, across it, and up the range of hills upon the other side.

As something about the trail seemed to strike him, Buffalo Bill suddenly hastened on, and, reaching a high elevation, took a survey of the scene below him.

The trail which the command was following led do

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into the valley beyond, and alongside of a steep bluff at its base, and this they were just passing when the scout arrived at his point of observation.

The course he had taken, in following the madman's trail, had brought him out at a point ahead of the marching soldiers.

But it was not upon them, as they went by at the base of the range of hills, that his eyes rested after the first glance, but upon the tall form of the Mad Hunter.

In an instant Buffalo Bill divined his object.

Thwarted in his revenge the night before, he had seen the trail the troopers had taken, and, acquainted with the locality, knew that they must pass under the bluff, and thence he had gone to head them off.

So intent was he at his work when Buffalo Bill stepped upon the hill above him that he did not see him.

He was gathering huge rocks and piling them upon the edge of the cliff, beneath which the head of the column soon must pass.

His intention was evident, for several hundred feet below him, and immediately beneath, the trail led, and the maddened being meant murder in its vilest shape.

At first the scout meant to hail the column and warn them of their danger; but, with a second glance at the madman, he changed his purpose, threw the rein of his horse over a limb, and, leaving his rifle hanging to his saddle, stepped noiselessly over the top of the hill and descended slowly toward the huge being at his devilish work.

With a shot from his revolver Buffalo Bill knew that he could drop him dead; but he was no man to take such an advantage even against one who was said to possess the strength of Samson.

With a step rendered light and noiseless by following many a deadly trail, the scout descended the hillside, keeping in the shelter of the scattering trees, until he stood within twenty feet of the Mad Hunter.

Buffalo Bill saw that his eyes were as fierce as a wolf's, that his hands opened and shut with nervous clutches, and his body was bent forward with eager hope of cruel revenge.

Nearer and nearer drew the column of soldiers.

Through a gap in the bluff Buffalo Bill saw that Captain Keyes and those about him were to be the object of the Mad Hunter's attention, and he stood ready to act.

As they rode from sight upon the trail winding directly under the precipitous hillside, the madman carefully selected a huge stone, and, raising it above his head, was picking out his victim, when Buffalo Bill bounded from his place of concealment, and, with a revolver in one hand, with the other lightly touched the giant upon the shoulder, with the quiet remark:

"Say, Shanghai pard, drop that tombstone and tackle me, if you are pining to kill somebody!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

FLIGHT.

The madman's gigantic frame, rendered larger by his hairy attire and high wolfskin cap, his savage, bearded face, made him a foe that few men would have dared to face.

Buffalo Bill could have dropped him in his tracks as he stood, but there was too much manliness in his nature to take such an advantage, although he knew he had little more than a wild beast in ferocity to deal with.

The madness of the man he pitied, and he determined to see if he could not cow him into submission.

He was wholly upon his guard, therefore, when he laid his hand upon the arm of the madman.

The madman shrunk back as though an adder had stung him, at the same time uttering a wild cry of terror.

Still he did not lower his upraised hands, nor drop the huge stone they held.

Trembling violently, he gazed upon the scout, who kept him covered with his revolver, and as the fierce expression in his eyes changed to a look Buffalo Bill, who watched him like a hawk, could not fathom, he began to back slowly from before the man who had so boldly confronted him.

His wild yell had been heard by the marching soldiers below, a shout had been the answer, and the column had halted and stood gazing, as though spell-bound with horror, upon the scene through a break in the bluff.

This much Buffalo Bill saw, as well that the madman was backing off so that he could get space to hurl the stone at him.

"Drop that stone, old Bluebeard!"

The order was given in a stern, threatening tone, in spite of the light words, and Buffalo Bill held the eye of the madman as he spoke.

Instantly the heavy stone fell with a crash to earth, and the madman's hands dropped to his side, passing the butts of his pistols with no effort to grasp them.

"Why, this is a picnic, when I expected to tackle a cyclone," said the scout, in his off-hand way, and still covering the madman, he was about to advance upon him, when a loud cry came from the plain below:

"Hold, Cody! for God's sake, hold!"

But he uttered no word in reply, and again nerved himself to advance upon the madman.

As for the strange being, he seemed not to have heard the cry, but stood trembling, and gazing upon the scout, while his jaws moved as though he was gritting his teeth with rage.

Seeing Buffalo Bill again advance, as though to try his strength with the madman, for he had lowered his weapon, Captain Keyes shouted:

"Hold, Cody, for here comes Texas Jack, who can drop him where he stands."

But Buffalo Bill heeded not the command, and at once stepped boldly toward the madman.

As he did so the strange being gave a cry of seeming fright, shrank backward, waved his hands, as though to ward off the scout, and then, with the bound of a deer, had started away in a wild run.

Buffalo Bill was amazed, and half raised his revolver, as though to check his flight; but, thinking better of it on the instant, returned the weapon to his belt with the remark:

"Poor, mad wretch; let him go."

Beholding the flight of the madman, when they had expected to see him spring upon the scout, the soldiers broke forth in one long, wild cheer, and up the hillside floated the ringing words:

"Bravo for you, Buffalo Bill!"

The scout raised his hat in response and turned away, and though the command waited for some time, as though expecting to have him join them, he did not come.

Then Texas Jack went up to the top of the bluff, and soon after returned to report that he had seen nothing of the madman, or of Buffalo Bill, either.

"But where had they gone?" persisted the captain.

"The trail showed that the madman had dug out for all he was worth, sir, and that Buffalo Bill was hot on his tracks."

"Then Buffalo Bill has again gone in chase of the madman, Jack."

"Holy smoke! Look there!"

The exclamation of the guide, followed by his words in a loud voice, caused every eye to glance upward, for his gaze was fixed upon the top of the bluff which they had passed beneath only a few moments before.

There was no reason for any one to ask what had caused that cry, for there, in plain view of all, were visible two human forms, engaged in a death struggle, upon the very verge of the precipice.

When Buffalo Bill allowed the madman to go, from pity, his next thought was that he would yet kill, if he could, Captain Keyes or others, and he followed him, to again discover him, on another bluff, about to hurl a large stone down upon the soldiers.

He tried to make him yield to him, but in an instant the madman was upon him, striving to hurl him from the cliff.

But, with his words of alarm, Texas Jack had thrown his rifle to his shoulder, watched his chance and pulled the trigger.

Back from the bluff staggered the madman, and away up the steep path bounded Texas Jack.

There lay the madman—dead.
Texas Jack's shot had done its work.

But Buffalo Bill had gone. He feared that Captain Keyes would prevent him from keeping his pledge to White Antelope.

The madman was buried where he had fallen, and Captain Keyes then marched on to the valley, to place the bodies of Lieutenant Danforth and his men in their graves.

He quickly fortified his camp, buried his dead, and then moved off to a strong position, half a day's march away, while Texas Jack and his men in buckskin scouted about in search of their chief, the Border King.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RENEGADE'S TREACHERY.

Buffalo Bill is a man who takes desperate chances. He always did so, and he had made up his mind to return and keep his pledge to White Antelope.

He believed that he had a way to escape death.

At any rate he would try it.

So he left the bluff, after the madman's fall, and determined to scout toward the Indian village, come what might.

Chief Oak Heart's village was in a position from which he knew it would be almost impossible for the soldiers to dislodge him.

As the time wore away different bands of warriors came into the Indian village, and all had strange stories to tell their great chief.

To these stories Oak Heart and his head chiefs listened, and the name of Buffalo Bill, or *Pa-e-has-ka*, became a greater terror than ever.

Among the chiefs sat one who had listened to every story told in the council-lodge, and no one would have deemed his painted face concealed the white man.

But so it was, and at last he spoke:

"*Pa-e-has-ka* is my foe, and I sought his life; but he is the pale-face brave that the White Antelope sent to give the Oak Heart warning that his enemies should not follow upon his trail.

"The White Antelope turned a panther loose upon the trail of my red brothers, and he told her that he would return and give himself up to the Oak Heart. Has he come back?"

"No!" was the answer of many.

"But the warriors come in and tell how he has killed their comrades, scalped their brothers and laughed at them for squaws. Will the Sioux braves let the pale-face dog throw dirt in their faces? Is he not now not far from their village, and yet no warrior brings in his scalp? Let my medicine braves seek his trail and bring him alive into the presence of the great chief, and th-

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Death Killer will show them how the *Pa-e-has-ka* will weep like a squaw when he feels the grip of his foe upon him!"

This speech of the renegade, Boyd Bennett, excited the Indian warriors to frenzy, and within half an hour after it was uttered a hundred of the best braves of the tribe had gone forth to hunt down their terrible foe.

From his return to the gory field, to take the scalp of Lieutenant Danforth, and finding Buffalo Bill there to defend it, Bennett, the renegade, had thirsted for revenge upon the scout.

He had secretly dispatched a noted brave upon his trail of revenge, and as that very daring warrior did not return, he feared that he had come to grief at the hands of the man he went to slay.

For defending the scout and permitting Buffalo Bill to go free, upon his pledge to return, the renegade had not forgiven White Antelope.

Yet he knew the influence she held in the tribe, that, upon account of her having been born with yellow hair, and growing up far more beautiful than any maiden in the tribe, she was regarded as a favored child of the Great Spirit, and that should he cross her will, he would lose the power he had gained over her people.

He had hoped to win the girl's love, when he first came to the tribe; but she had treated him with disdain, and this was another reason why he felt revengeful toward her.

To get an Indian to aid him in a plot against White Antelope he knew was impossible, yet he did not despair, and when he left the council-lodge, he determined in some way to get rid of the girl, as he hoped that Buffalo Bill might be captured, and if so, she might save him from death.

He went over to the *tepee* of the pretty Sioux Queen, and engaged her in conversation, asking her when the pale-face scout intended to keep his word to her and come to the Indian village.

"The Long Hair has a straight tongue; he will come," said the girl, confidently.

White Antelope soon after mounted her pony and took a gallop down the valley.

She passed the guards about the village, and unheeding their warning not to venture far, rode to the top of a ridge.

The young Indian brave who was on guard there

watched her attentively, and she, having won his heart, he seemed to forget all else, now that she was before his eyes.

So wrapped up was he in the young girl, that he did not behold a form suddenly bound from behind a rock nearby, and when he did see it, before he could utter his defiant warcry, his throat was crushed in a mighty grip; he was dragged back out of sight, and a long knife sent to the hilt in his heart.

Then the scalp-lock was torn from his head, ere life was extinct, and the young brave's love-dream had ended.

Seated by the side of his victim, the slayer gazed upon him with a look of real pleasure at his deed, while he muttered in a sinister tone:

"I love blood, and his death shall be laid on Buffalo Bill. Now to find the White Antelope, and then—

"There she comes! Now to catch her as she goes by!"

He crouched back in the shelter of a rock as he spoke, while White Antelope, upon whom his eyes were fixed with murderous intent, came riding slowly back toward the village.

Suddenly she gave a cry of alarm, and tried to wheel her pony about and dash away, for to her side had sprung the form of Boyd Bennett.

But he placed his hand over her mouth, seized her firmly in his arms, and turning her pony loose, darted down a defile, unseen by any of the other Indian guards, nearly a quarter of a mile away.

In a large cavern, penetrating a pile of rocks, rising to an elevation that commanded a view of the Indian village, several miles distant, sat Buffalo Bill.

He had his field glass in his hand, and had been long gazing upon the Indian camp.

"Well, I'll never get them down finer than I have them now," he said, thoughtfully.

"I wish I had some one with me whom I could send back on the trail and report to Captain Keyes just the situation of the village, and how many warriors Oak Heart has."

"I have been hanging about this village long enough now, for I have done my work well."

As he spoke, the relentless scout held up a string of scalps which he had taken since the massacre of Danforth and his men.

"But I am getting tired of this, and if I do not catch

Bennett soon, I will go boldly into the village and claim the protection of the sacred pipe I carry.

"I'll risk it, for I believe in its power."

As he uttered the words, Buffalo Bill saw Boyd Bennett come into view not far away, and in his grasp was White Antelope, a prisoner.

Catching sight of Buffalo Bill, she cried in English:

"*Pa-e-has-ka*, save White Antelope!"

"I will kill her," shrieked the renegade.

But they were his last words, for, seeing that her death was certain if he hesitated longer, Buffalo Bill pulled the trigger of his revolver, and the bullet crashed through the brain of Boyd Bennett.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PLEDGE KEPT.

There was great excitement in the village of the Sioux.

The Sioux Queen, the idolized White Antelope, had ridden away from her *tepee* and had not yet returned.

Then came the news that one of the most promising young warriors of the tribe had been slain and scalped while on guard at one of the passes to the village.

This was fearful news, and Buffalo Bill was set down as the perpetrator of the deed.

While the chiefs were in council, a horse was seen approaching the guard at the pass where the young brave had been killed that afternoon.

Upon his back were two persons, one of them appearing to be a great chief in full war paint, feathers and head dress, and the other was White Antelope.

The chief grunted a salutation to the guards, though who he was none of them knew, while the girl spoke to them, and said the brave chief had rescued her from great danger.

Straight to the council-lodge the chief rode, and dismounting quickly, the two entered, the young girl leading the way.

A cry arose at sight of White Antelope, who, as their queen, had entrance there, and then all eyes were turned upon her companion, while she said in a voice that reached every ear in the grand lodge:

"The *Pa-e-has-ka* spoke with a straight tongue.

"He is here!"

The war-bonnet was thrown aside, and the blanket

held in front of the face was removed, and Buffalo Bill stood revealed, alone among his enemies.

A deep murmur ran around the crowd of chiefs, and it was half surprise, half admiration at the bold pale-face who had redeemed his word to White Antelope.

Fearlessly the scout stood before his foes, his eyes resting upon the face of Oak Heart.

"The Long Hair must die!" said Oak Heart, and the words were echoed upon all sides.

But Buffalo Bill's face never changed color.

"Let the Sioux Queen speak!" said Chief Oak Heart.

Instantly there was a dead silence, and she told the story of her adventure with the renegade. How he had killed the young brave at the pass, and how she had been saved by Buffalo Bill, when the Death Killer had her a prisoner.

All eyes turned upon Oak Heart, for it was for him to speak.

Deep and earnest came his words:

"The Long Hair is a mighty pale-face chief.

"He has trailed the redman to his village, and his belt is heavy with the scalp-locks of my braves.

"He came here under the war-bonnet of a Cheyenne Chief.

"He has saved the Sioux Queen from death.

"The Long Hair is not afraid of death, and he must show my warriors how he can die!"

Buffalo Bill simply smiled, and said:

"The Oak Heart is a great chief, and *Pa-e-has-ka* has heard his words.

"*Pa-e-has-ka* has slain his young braves, and his belt is heavy with their scalp-locks.

"But does the Oak Heart forget many moons ago, when his little daughter, the sunlight of his heart, was captured by a Pawnee brave, and that a pale-face took her from him, and gave her to the great chief to place again in his heart?

"The Oak Heart gave the *Pa-e-has-ka* then this sacred pipe and tomahawk with the broken edge, in token that he would never be his foe.

"See! must the *Pa-e-has-ka* die?"

As Buffalo Bill spoke, he held up the sacred pipe and the tomahawk with its edge all broken.

A deathlike silence fell upon all; then Oak Heart

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arose, and, stepping up to the scout, threw around him his snowwhite robe, and said, impressively:

"The *Pa-e-has-ka* is the friend of Oak Heart.

"When the tomahawk shall be buried between their people, they shall be brothers.

"But now the palefaces are on the trail of my children, so let the *Pa-e-has-ka* go from my village back to his people, and not one of my young braves shall follow his trail.

"The Oak Heart has spoken."

A grunt of assent showed that the assembled chiefs agreed with their great leader.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

The scene changes once more to Fort Advance, days after the one on which Buffalo Bill returned to Chief Oak Heart's village to keep his pledge to the White Antelope, the half-breed "Girl Queen of the Sioux."

Suddenly a horseman rides into the fort.

He is mounted upon a large white horse that is gaunt yet spirited.

The rider looks pale and jaded, and his buckskin attire has seen hard usage.

But he is recognized as he enters the lines, and one voice after another breaks forth in the cheer for "Buffalo Bill, the King of the Border!"

Removing his broad, much-worn, blood-stained sombrero from his head, he rides through the ranks to headquarters and dismounts.

An orderly seizes his bridle rein, and Major Baldwin comes forth and grasps his hand, with the words:

"Thank God, Cody, we meet again! Captain Keyes returned to tell all, and we believed you dead."

"It was close shaving, major, but not to be, this time," was the answer.

"And you won out, Bill?"

"Yes, Major Baldwin. I went into Oak Heart's village, know just how many Sioux braves he has, and all of interest about the really grand old red sinner that you would like to know. But you'll not catch him this year, I wager high."

"I fear not. But how did you escape, Bill?"

"Through the good medicine charm I had given me long ago by old Oak Heart himself, and also with the aid of the half-breed Sioux queen."

"And those scalplocks, Bill?" and the major pointed to a string of ghastly trophies hanging from his belt.

"Oh, these are the head roofs of the braves who tried to raise my hair, major. I intended to have a rope made of them to hang that renegade, Boyd Bennett with, but I had to shoot him."

"You killed him?"

"I had to do it; so I'll have the scalp-locks made into a bridle for you."

"Thank you, Bill; it will be a rare gift, and one most highly prized. By their number, I should judge that you had kept your oath to avenge poor Danforth."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, and soon after went to his quarters, where he was warmly greeted by Texas Jack and his faithful band of scouts.

Several days after he reported for duty, and once more performed daring deeds to add to his fame as the Border King.

THE END.

The next number will contain "Buffalo Bill's Victory; or, A Trail of Terror."

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